







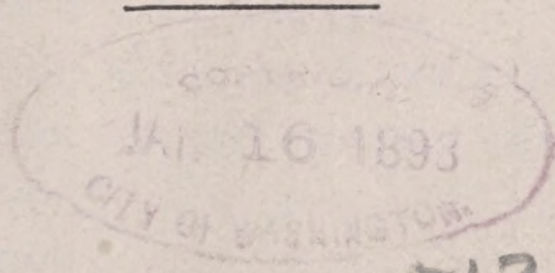
THE RED HUSSAR REELED ON THE NARROW FOOTING.—PAGE 343.

THE
YOUNGEST SOLDIER
OF
THE GRAND ARMÉE.

✓
BY FORTUNE DU BOISGOBEY.

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CHICAGO:

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CHAPTER I.

THE RAID OF THE RED HUSSARS.

On the 28th of January, 1814, three cavalry soldiers were riding at a walking gait up the wooded hill between Brienne and St. Dizier, in the Champagne country of France, then a deserted tract. A deep vale was hollowed out beneath the leafless trees edging the left side of the road. It was gloomy weather, and the morning mist decorated the meadows with gray plumes, between which might be caught a glimpse of a village church steeple here and there. On the right hand a thick hedge bounded the sight.

For several days it had been freezing, and the stony ground rang sharply under the horses' shoes. This was the only sound disturbing the stillness of the solitude, for the troopers rode on without speaking.

The ample snowy mantles which draped them from head to boot allowed nothing to be seen but the bright brazen helmets and the polished steel scabbard-tip of their sabers.

Bowed forward in their saddles, they made their way but slowly against an icy wind lashing their faces. Their wearied bearing and their fagged chargers' pace revealed that their duty was an ardu-

ous one. It was not the gait of victors, and this squad of mute riders was as mournful as the landscape. The breeze brought none of the sounds following armies, such as the dull rumble of artillery caissons, and the flourishes of bugles with their time marked by the drum taps; and yet it was plain that war had swept over this desolate spot. Indeed, the soil was strewn with rags of uniforms, smashed knapsacks, and cast horse-shoes, but no corpses or wounded stragglers were visible.

The three had reached the last turn of the highway when the muffled report of a musket rose from the valley bottom.

"Halt!" the central rider ordered in a curt voice.

All drew rein and the steeds snorted while their masters stretched their necks the better to listen. Three or four detonations followed the isolated one almost immediately; then, the sounds became continuous. It was like the pelting of hail on a roof, and the volleys were readily distinguished from the firing at will.

"There's our army!" exclaimed the horseman on the right, rising in his stirrups and getting his horse well in hand.

"Do you think so, youngster?" calmly asked the first speaker.

"Why, captain, you must have heard that firing?"

"I hear it clearly, and that is just why I am sure you are at fault." Turning to his comrade on his left, he said, in his tone of command: "Ratibal!"

"Present, captain!"

"Dismount; enter the wood to its skirt, doing your best to see what goes on without being espied; return to report."

"Right," answered the trooper, leaving his horse and gliding into the copse.

The rider on the captain's sword-hand quivered in his seat, as though it fretted him to have to keep still. He was a handsome youth in his seventeenth year or little more, whose finely cut, regular features were half concealed by the visor and strap of his dragoon's casque. His complexion was fresh, like that of one reared under frigid skies, and his eyes were blue. As yet his moustache had not shown itself even in down. With these rosy cheeks and his cherubic air, spite of some length of limb, he suggested a boy playing at soldier.

"So my young gentleman, you fancy that we have dropped on our division in this abrupt style and that all I have to do is to command: 'Fall in by twos; forward, march; walk, trot!'"

The speaker of this ironical professional jest offered a striking contrast to the novice, as he was one of those veterans whose age cannot be pronounced upon; in other words, his bright eyes and grizzled locks might as well belong to a vigorous warrior of thirty-five as to an old war dog of nearer fifty. His tanned skin had braved all the tempests the French army had faced for fifteen years, from Nile sands to the Vistula's clay banks, and it was hard to decide whether Russian snow or Egyptian sun had most hardened the energetic visage. He

eyed the beginner with a jeering smile which disclosed his white teeth, and his moustache bristled.

"But, captain, the firing is growing hotter," almost timidly ventured the beardless soldier.

"Cornet Albert Boissier," spoke the veteran, "I am going to give you a practical lesson in the military art. It cannot do you any harm, as your experience of warfare was on the worst side and against those savages, the Muscovites, though it was taken in consideration by his Majesty the Emperor, when he allowed you to pass through the College of St. Cyr without requiring the tests which other budding generals have to suffer."

Experience, and a boy of seventeen? Yes, and remarkable, too. Albert was the only son of a lieutenant-colonel of Grenadiers of the Guard, who had become colonel after the victory of Smolensko in August, 1812, and would have been farther promoted but for his dying of wounds received in the subsequent victory of the Borodino. His wife was an Austrian lady of high birth, whose acquaintance he had formed in Italy when he was a young officer attending Napoleon at the rising of his "star," of which he foresaw the splendor; and she, though her father fell in the opposite ranks, was also bewitched by the young conqueror, and became his fervent admirer. To be nearer her husband, and to participate in the rejoicings confidently expected to await the Grande Armée in the realm of the Czar, she traveled, in the autumn of 1812, through Poland, and on hearing that the victories on the road to Moscow had

apparently cleared the way to the emperor's ultimate triumph, she lavished from a full purse for a sledge with fine horses, and an escort of Russ-hating Polanders, to be transported with her son, Albert, to be the first to figure in the court which the victor would hold in the halls of the Czars.

Alas! the flames of Moscow, burned by the patriots, consumed her evanescent dream. She arrived too late even to see her husband, dead from glorious wounds, and began, with the wrecked army, that retreat which scarcely another lady shared.

Woe upon woe befell her. A rich contractor's escort requisitioned her horses; the Polanders had been pressed into the army service; she was butchered by the marauders who harassed the rear of the fleeing forces, though the Cossacks harried them and stole their crime-stained plunder. Her boy shared her hourly apprehensions, had to wield sword and pistol for her defense and his own, and was flung, after a final encounter, in which she disappeared in the snowdrifts, on the embers of their bivouac to roast or be smothered by the snow, which luckily extinguished it. He was found, grief-stricken and exhausted, by a band of stragglers of his father's regiment, and accompanied them, when rallied to Marshal Ney's rear-guard, to the melancholy crossing of the frontier. Moscow was fired in the middle of September, and the ignominious retreat was begun in a month after. Albert, adopted by the Grenadiers, was not allowed from his tender years to be retained by the veterans. Nevertheless, his father's

brother-officers would not suffer him to be checked in the military career by want. His uncle was a rich banker who was suspected to be on the royalist side, and the soldiers took delight in thwarting a possible chance of his growing up an anti-Imperialist under the wing of this relative. They used their influence to enter him in the military college and kept his claim to remembrance so persistently before their master, that soon, ravenous for followers, he drew Albert from the seminary and gave him a cornet's commission. But it was not in his father's arm of the service ; he was to begin his apprenticeship in the cavalry. Thus he was under the orders of Captain Champoreau of the Seventh Dragoons.

"Mark," continued the latter, "the riot that you hear down yonder comes from a detachment of regular troops skirmishing with irregulars. You have not a musical ear or you would have noticed the hoarse bang of fowling-pieces—hark ! Pung, pung ! and now Bang, bang ! that is the big muzzles answering."

"In any case, captain, it is our own people fighting, and were we to gallop up—"

"We may have to do that, my boy, we may—and faster than at a gallop ; but the first thing is to hear the report of Ratibal, who is on the way back."

In truth, the scout appeared on the roadside. The more easily to penetrate the thicket, he had taken off his white cloak, so that he showed a well-worn green coat with three chevrons on the sleeve, and red shoulderknots : the dragoon's glorious uniform.

"Nothing, captain ; only the enemy driving rustics out of a farm."

"He was right," muttered the youth, surprised at the old hand's sagacity.

"Pierre Champoreau does not often blunder when a-field, my lad," observed the latter with a meaning wink. "How many do you make out the sour-kROUT eaters to be?"

"Twenty white-coats on foot and a few light-horsemen in scarlet, commanded by an officer of rank, with a carriage on the road."

"I see: an escort to an old general's carriage. Did the bumpkins look like holding their own?"

"They fought like wild cats ; and it would not surprise me if they had a soldier in their midst, for they had barricaded the house properly, and were firing out of the windows guardedly ; but still it is my opinion that they must be whipped out of it."

"Dash it all ! we cannot let our own countrymen be massacred," quickly said the young officer.

"Stop a minute, young sir," went on the old officer, with the same coolness. "I want nothing better than to lend these louts a helping hand, but we are bound to move in a military manner."

"The farmhouse is only three gunshots from the edge of the wood, and we could creep up under cover," suggested the private trooper.

"That's good enough, then; but you know these parts—where are we?"

"Sooth to say, it is no end of time since I was here, but for all that I reckon we are not far from

St. Dizier; and it is my idea that this is the Montier-in-Der Forest on our right, so that the hamlet below would be called Eclaron."

"That's odd," said the officer, suddenly falling into thought. "Last night the Emperor was to sleep at St. Dizier, and do we meet here the tail of Schwartzenberg's army, eh? He must be coming back this way, and it behooves us to keep our eyes skinned, or we may get squeezed."

"But those poor peasants will be slaughtered," remonstrated the boy-officer, who had not seen enough suffering on the retreat from Russia to harden his heart, and whose humanity made him forget the position he held in rank.

"We are going to see about that, young man, particularly as it is high time to reconnoiter our own position.

"Away we go, then," ejaculated Boissier, giving rein to his horse.

"Not so fast," replied the elder, seizing his bridle with an iron hand which made the steed rear, and bringing him to a stop. He alighted, and continued: "According to the regulations we dragoons may fight mounted or afoot. At present, we become infantry. Ratibal, stay here to guard the horses, while we push on to see how our Champagne peasants fight the invaders."

"All I am afraid of is that we shall arrive too late," grumbled the fiery youth.

For the few moments preceding this, the musketry fire had relaxed, and the already better trained ear

of the cornet of horse remarked that it was the regular guns that predominated with their constant fire. The rustics' coarse weapons sounded only at rare intervals with dull reports smothered by the fusillade, much as notes from the flageolets would be drowned in a band when the clarions blared. Both officers strode into the underwood, and soon arrived on its border at the valleyside. Directly beneath them, a natural ridge cut the slope across at about breast height; lower down, the declivity sloped gently to an immense mead.

The action was taking place around a lonely farm house, seeming to stand as advanced post to Eclaron village, built on a pretty river bank a short distance off. The dragoons overlooked the scene, and could descry every detail like spectators of a play from the upper gallery. The fields were utterly deserted, and vast clouds of black smoke were whirling above the apparently abandoned dwellings. A dozen of them were blazing at the same time, and at whiles down would fall a wall, or a roof would sink in with a horrifying crash. Cut partly away by bullets, the wooden steeple of the village church hung over like a tree all but felled. At the farther end of the plain and on the opposite hillside, such carts and cattle were hurrying off as could be saved by the unfortunate farmers. It was a picture of foreign invasion in its reddest and blackest colors.

"By thunder!" roared the captain, while his eyes seemed to kindle from those flames, "these are but marauders in soldiers' coats; the black sheep of their

army; those first at the plundering and last at the fray."

"What a pity," sighed the young officer, whose childhood's eyes had been seared by the conflagration of Moscow and could not be expected to see here more than a bonfire; "it is all over." He had lost the color which the prospect of fighting had raised and the finger was bloodless with which he pointed to the grange.

Just before he spoke, the door had begun to yield under the redoubled blows from musket-butts, and the victors started in a rush to take the house valiantly defended. The intrepid peasants had quitted the window to meet the assailants, who had found the contest murderous, as several dead bodies were stretched on the sward.

On the highway running across the plain, as Ratibal had reported, a traveling coach, with four horses, was stationed about fifty paces from the bullet-perforated walls. By the doorway was a mounted officer, who seemed at the same time to guard it and watch how the attack went on.

"What the mischief is that strapping ruffian in scarlet doing by that coach?" muttered the dragoon captain. "If this be the style in which his men are shown how to storm fortified houses, I do not compliment them. The Austrians have fallen off sadly since your father and I fought them beyond the Alps."

"Oh, hark!" interrupted the young man, grasping his arm.

The rattle of a few gunshots, stifled partially by the walls of the shattered house, betokened the end of the stubborn struggle. A lugubrious silence ensued.

"The place is taken, and there is no more for us to do than fall back," philosophically observed the old dragoon.

"Oh, captain, look!" exclaimed the cornet, in a voice shaking with emotion.

Out of the abode a confused crowd was rushing, and one could discern furious soldiers surrounding prisoners whom they dragged up to their commander at the vehicle. In the midst a woman's white gown stood out upon the ruddy hussar uniform, and the hapless creature's screams rose to the wood where the dragoons were hidden.

"The scoundrels!" cried the younger officer, shaking his fist at the raiders. "Must we stand by, captain, and let these ruffians cut a woman's throat?"

"Keep cool, young sir—keep cool—devil take it! At present we can do nothing, but there may be a change by-and-by."

The scene shifted in the vale. The Austrian leader gesticulated and seemed to issue orders, with a short and decisive result. In less than a minute, the young woman, in spite of desperate resistance, was hurried into the vehicle, which was drawn away at a smart trot. It was followed by the officer and a dozen soldiers, quickening their pace; the others detached and proceeded through the meadow toward the hill,

"They are coming straight to us," said the captain in an undertone.

The little troop came on quickly, shoving before them a couple of prisoners; one walked with much trouble, as he was wounded.

"This is getting interesting, and we have front seats to see the sport," whispered the old officer; "but what are they coming up here to do? Oh, stay, I have it. They mean to shoot them, set with their backs to the rock over which we are hanging."

"But are we not going to fall upon these rascals?" inquired the cornet.

His captain made no haste to answer. With profound attention he was watching what happened underneath them. The carriage and its escort were already out of sight, having plunged into the wood; but the rest were rapidly approaching. They numbered seven, officered by a corporal, and they were driving the doomed ones to their place of execution with thumps of their muskets.

"Hang me if there is not a soldier of ours among them, beside the *chaw-bacon*," said the captain.

"True, true, I can see his shako and cross-belts," agreed the other quickly.

"Cornet Boissier," went on the old dragoon, in a crisp, well-controlled voice, "be good enough to go after my orderly Ratibal, awaiting us on the road. Mount your horse, bid him do the same, and bring my jade in hand. Mind! above all, no noise in coming back through the wood."

The youth wanted no urging, but sprang away

under the brush. In five minutes he was on the return with the trooper, and the captain, who had been impatiently waiting for them, was soon in the saddle. Still the 'prentice soldier did not perceive the best plan, and he asked with much anxiety of himself what was to happen.

"Have you a firm seat in the saddle?" inquired the dragoon.

"Why; rather so," replied the other, blushing a little, for he had taken to horse-riding at the school with extraordinary liking, which had overcome his fears and made him bear the tumbles as mere by-play; "beside the lessons I was always out riding in the park."

"Very good—I don't doubt your skill," interrupted the superior, hiding a smile in his moustache. "Furthermore, I notice that your nag has sound legs," added he, scrutinizing the charger with an expert's eye. "So now, heed the operation, and do exactly what you see me do."

The wood thinned out on the pasture-land in clumps of trees thick enough to hide the horsemen. But there was a clearing scooping out the woody border on the right to some extent.

The Austrians were scarcely a dozen paces distant.

"Are you ready, Ratibal?" demanded the old officer, lowering his voice.

"Never fear, captain, I have Coco well in hand under me."

The corporal conducting the detachment growled

some order, and his men stooped with the automatic precision distinguishing the older Imperial regiments and those dolls which dance on the top of hand-organs. The two prisoners had guessed what was to be their fate; they shook hands and waited with lofty heads. The under officer came to them, shoved them with wooden-headed roughness to the foot of the hill, set their backs to a flat-fronted boulder, and strutted tranquilly back to his file. The three dragoons, ambushed in the wood, were directly over their countrymen's heads and could not see them.

"Draw sabers and oblique march to the right," said the captain.

The firing party were in a row only five paces from the prisoners; upon the call of the corporal the soldiers lifted their guns.

"Out, and upon them!" roared the captain in a voice of thunder.

"Down with them!" shouted the cornet and the private, as the three, letting their chargers loose at the same time, dashed abreast out on the level land.

Through luck or skill, not one lost his seat in this daring leap, and they alighted from the perilous flight almost in a line as accurate as in the woods. The enemy were so close that they were upon them when they landed. The strange appearance of this cavalry, as if dropping out of the skies, was enough in itself to put a host to flight; and the firing platoon scattered without firing a shot or using the bayonets. But the new comers had not risked breaking their necks for nothing.

"Charge!" shouted the captain, bending forward to deliver a thrust.

The action was short but decisive. The corporal alone thought of defending himself; he blazed away at Ratibal, whose moustache he singed, but the saber clove his formidable Danubian oath in his gullet. The captain split one skull, stabbed three soldiers through the back, and still kept on after the fugitives. Albert Boissier, unaccustomed to the heavy cavalry-sword, had not dealt any cuts or thrusts so deadly, but his horse's breast had upset one foeman without there being need or any wish on his part to finish him. The victory was complete. Out of the eight men in the file, four had bitten the dust; one was rolling on the ground half stunned, and the other three were running off as fast as legs could carry them. The captain had been compelled to give up pursuit, as his mare sank to the fetlock in the swampy soil at every stride, and he leisurely rode back. In a matter-of-fact way he wiped his blade on his horse's mane and then proudly twisted his moustache into trim again. Still bloodless from excess of excitement, his pupil could not help admiring this soldier whom he had inwardly accused of caution, but who had discomfited a whole platoon.

The united dash was so unlike the disorganized rush of the Cossack lancers on the fleeing French in Russia, under his eyes, blinded by the snow and hail, that he still contemplated with amazement the insensible Austrian at his feet. He was so far from

conscious of what he had done in the charge that he believed he had cut him down, but suddenly the supposed corpse sprang nimbly up and set to running on the road. While the youth hesitated about following, a gunshot cracked close to his ear, and he saw the unhappy flier pitch over like a shot hare, with his arms thrown out beyond his extended neck. Ten seconds after, he writhed no more, and a trickle of blood streaked the grass.

"These outlandish guns are not so bad!" piped a jibing voice beside Boissier, who turned and faced a queer character.

This was a lad younger than he, slight, thin, sal-low, with small grey eyes and a turn-up nose; he leaned on the horse's crupper, and leered and grinned up at him. This Flibberty gibbet wore the French foot soldier's uniform with the lavish embroidery specially adorning the drum corps. In his hand he was still holding the gun with which he had fired, one evidently picked up on the battle-field. He seemed delighted with his feat.

"I suppose you would testify that I knocked him over, eh, officer?" he said with a nasal twang and with the unctuous drawl popular among the low order of Parisians.

The cornet examined him with astonishment, wondering whence had sprung up this manikin so pleased with his own prowess; but he understood what had occurred with a little reflection. When the dragoons brought the unexpected deliverance to the prisoners, they were awaiting death with their

backs to the rocks. Almost over their heads the horses had leaped, and the combat had ended so quickly that they had no time to participate in it. But the younger of the pair had tried to make up for lost time by catching up a fallen musket and making use of it.

"Who is that firing without orders?" demanded Champoreau, as he pulled up his horse within a neck of the boy.

"Kindly let me off this once, captain," whined the little soldier, without hesitation. "I am a drummer and I have drilled with the drum sticks and not ramrods."

Champing his moustache to hide a smile, the veteran abruptly asked:

"What are you doing here?"

"Didn't you see, captain? I was polishing off the *Kaiserlichs*—the Austrians; I get a cent a day for the work."

"Come, come, none of your nonsense, lad! What is your name and your number, and why are you not with your regiment?"

"I am Auguste Cocagne, born in the St. Antoine suburb of Paris, a pupil drummer in the Ninth Light Infantry—the foremost regiment in France—all Paris boys; and for the present I am on leave at my uncle Lecomte's farm at Eclaron, in the Upper Marne district."

After this reply, uttered like a lesson from a schoolboy, he drew himself bolt upright, with the edge of one hand to his cap and staring straight in

front, as if a general were reviewing him. Though the captain had some difficulty in keeping serious, he retained his air of command.

"Leave of absence, before the enemy? Do you take me for a raw recruit that you sing such a song?" he sternly said.

"Oh, I can make that clear to you, captain," said the boy, without being abashed. "In the first place, my regiment is in Ricard's division, and I caught the typhus at Mentz. As I am an orphan—for, d'ye see, my mother, a lady of the canteen, stayed under the snows in the great Russian campaign—" this analogy of the lonely state and the loss of a mother doubled Albert's interest in the boy—"and my dad was killed last year at Hanau; so I came for my convalescence—a big mouthful, that, for a small boy—to my uncle Lecomte's, where I hoped to have finished my furlough. But I learnt that the enemy and all their carts and horses were coming along, and I was going to start to-morrow, to join my division, when those scamps of hussars and the *mud-regiment's* squad pounced on Eclaron."

"Where is your division?" inquired the captain, fully appeased.

"Out that way, by Troyes or Chalons, I don't rightly know; but at St. Dizier I expected to learn. Marshal Ney's corps—"

Albert never heard the name of Ney, "the last of the rear-guard of the Grande Armée," without feeling the inclination to salute.

"Ney's corps stopped for a sup and a bite there

yesterday, and I shall find some of the lads there to tell me whether it is to be 'two turns to the right or to the left, and follow your nose till you find it.'"

The boy uttered this last sentence with the accent of a countryman lost in the town, repeating a direction given by a townsman, all so drolly that the captain kept a sour face no longer,

"Come along, you drubber of a sheepskin," he laughingly said, "I will take you with me to St. Dizier. You speak too much and shoot too straight for me to waste you here. Come, brother," continued the captain to his lieutenant, "and close up, Ratibal, and let's decamp. The enemy may return, and we are short of infantry."

"Cry your pardon, captain; I would not refuse to make the march with you, but I cannot leave my poor uncle all alone here with these hunks of cold meat," said the drummer-boy, pointing with his toe to one of the dead bodies.

"Where is your uncle?"

"There, captain, but not in a state to do much marching and countermarching, for those ugly dogs pommeled him to a jelly with their clumsy musket-stocks."

"Very likely; I forgot all about the countryman," said the captain simply; "let us see how he is."

The lad's uncle was far from resembling him. He was a man full six feet in height, and otherwise of herculean proportions, as is often the case with working farmers, whose dress he wore. He might have attained his five-and-fortieth year, and his

countenance bore a remarkable expression of spirit and frankness. This robust cultivator was a model of those sons of the soil at whom the dwellers in towns sneer and jeer in times of peace, but on whom they rely to oppose the invader with their broad and dauntless breasts when the war-dogs are loosed.

"Well, my honest friend, have you the pluck to march with us?" hailed the captain.

"I don't think we wanted for that," returned the peasant, with mournful pride.

"Burn me if you did," agreed the dragoon, "for you held out in your home like those snuff-complexioned Spaniards at Saragossa. But if the enemy drop on you again, the fact of your resisting will entitle you to be shot offhand, with no mistake this time."

"I care not—they have taken my all," muttered the beaten man. "I may as well die here on my split hearthstone."

"Trash," resumed Champoreau, though he was inwardly melting; "better come on to St. Dizier, where the Emperor is, and when he hears, my honest friend, what a bitter pill you were for the enemy to take, he will give you the wherewithal to repair damages."

"No emperor can restore me my daughter," groaned the man in a sullen voice.

"Your daughter?" repeated Boissier, who was listening with lively emotion. "Was that the girl in a light dress that they took away?"

"I dare say," said the captain, between frowning

and grimly smiling; "a number of people dislike Frenchmen, but our women are thought agreeable enough."

"We will overtake them and bring her home, I warrant you," quickly declared the cornet to the bereaved father.

"Father Jacques," said the drummer-boy, earnestly, "won't you come along with us and help us recover Therése?"

The father started on hearing the endeared name.

"Talking of wolves," abruptly cried Ratibal, "there they come. Those Austrian hussars—and the white-coated foot—the officer in scarlet, and the carriage—in short, the whole collection."

"I told you that you should have a chance of getting our Therese home again," said Cocagne, as he held out his hand to assist his uncle to rise.

The dragoon had seen clearly, for the forayers were returning, numerous enough this time to make one mouthful of the five foes, to say nothing of one being mauled, one a boy and another little better in point of years.

"Those runaways brought the rest upon us," explained the captain, twirling his moustache.

"It was no fault of mine," criticised Cocagne, "if every one had laid out his man, as a little chap about my size and age did, we—"

"Silence in the ranks," the captain said, rising in his stirrups, the better to study the manner of the enemy's disposal.

The view was not encouraging; at most the road

by which the Austrians were arriving was only three hundred paces distant; and the level meadow offered no obstacle, not a ditch, a tree or even a bush. To cross this green in order to reach the farm ruins for shelter was exposure without any protection from the shots. It was no longer possible to climb back into the woods, unless they left the horses, which certainly could not scramble up the rocks. The little force was therefore condemned to stand and defend on the spot. Stay! another course remained: the horsemen might spur off, leaving the maltreated farmer and the drummer as a sacrifice. The captain alternately looked at the poor fellows whom he had saved, and at the Austrians, coming up at the quick step.

"It's a rub," grumbled the veteran; "I cannot let the enemy snap up my pair—my recruits, in a manner of speaking. It may cost us our skins but that drummer is a promising imp, and it would be a pity to have him snuffed out before he grows into a five-foot candle of glory on some battle-field. As for the other youngster, he is fit for other horse exercise than in a park. And the turnip-raiser," concluded the soldier, "I am in doubts what I ought to do about him."

Champoreau professed but a poor opinion for anybody out of military apparel. Spite of this defect, Lecomte carried himself manfully. With high head, inflamed face, and flashing eye, he forgot his bruises to watch the enemy angrily. After having aided him to stand up, his nephew had hurried

to turn the dead over and take their cartridge boxes.

"I call this tit for tat," he chuckled. "We are going to throw back to them the sugar-plums they brought all the way from Vienna."

Gladdened by this proof of a practical turn of mind, the captain admired the urchin who, it must be admitted, went about his work with unequaled quickness and dexterity.

"Perhaps I am unfair," the veteran mused, with a reproachful shake of the head; "this child of the city gutter is a perfect monkey when any fun is about, and his kinsmen does not look like wincing when the wind blows chill. It's worth while trying them in the fire."

Dismounting, he beckoned to the young dragoon for him to imitate the act. Ratibal had guessed his commander's intentions, for he was already on foot. "Hold the three chargers in a row," said Champoreau to him, "and you, youngster, pass us those sugar-plums, as you call them, with those sugar sticks five feet long."

"Coming, coming!" cried the boy, imitating the tapster in a wine-saloon.

The manœuvre conceived by the captain was very simple and had been practiced more than once by him in Spain, against the guerillas, or *guerilleros*, if it is not too late to be correct; the same act is not uncommon in lands where horses are plentifully caught, and the ground is prairie. It consists in substituting for the missing natural entrenchment a living wall, the horses performing the office of bas-

tions. Thus organized, the defense was perilous but reasonable. The fallen had furnished four muskets, enough for all, as Ratibal had unhooked his carbine from his saddle-bow. On these hooks and those of the other animals, Cocagne had hung all the cartouch-boxes, containing a hundred rounds. The main thing was to aim well and fire true.

The enemy were within a hundred paces, tramping on without distrust from not understanding the precautions. They had a picturesque appearance, as their uniforms were mixed: white coats, green ones of the skirmishers from the Tyrol, and the red of the hussars, for some of this branch had left their horses or lost them recently. The mounted officer, the carriage and the troopers for escort, remained on the road, as they had previously done during the attack on the grange.

"Are you ready?" inquired Champoreau, resting his musket on the saddle hollow as it were in a rampart embrasure.

"As soon as you like," replied the drummer-boy, obliged to stand on tiptoe to aim over the crupper of the captain's mare.

"Then, fire at will, and try your best not to waste your powder."

Four shots went off at almost the same time, and two men fell.

"Re-load," said the old officer, with the same easy unconcern of one ordering a drill exercise.

The enemy were surprised into stopping short, but they replied with a general volley; too high in

level, the balls hurtled overhead, and the captain twirled his moustache in token of pleasure as, when he was in the contrary mood, he champed it.

"Now, come on—let us have a grasp on them," said Farmer Lecomte, making to spring from behind the equine breastwork.

"Keep your place, daddy," sternly commanded the leader; "we are not in any force to make sorties. Besides, we must see how these fellows go to work since we have rubbed them up the wrong way."

Ratibal, who had a sound head and keen eyes, was again the first to discern the Austrians' next action. They had fallen back in a body around their wary chief, who enjoyed the sight from a safe distance, and by the prudent warrior's waves of the hand it was clear that he wanted them to rush once more upon the foe. But they displayed no zest for the assault, and the debate continued until the dragoon suddenly exclaimed: "Burn my boots!" a favorite vociferation of his—"blessed if they are not going to bring the carriage to bear on us!"

"Ha, ha!" gruffly chuckled the captain. "I see the trick; they are copying our own lesson right enough; they are going to use the vehicle as a movable fort in the same way as we converted the horses into a cover. Not at all backward of these beer-bibbers; but I reckon on our having the best of the joke."

CHAPTER II.

STEEL AND BRASS.

It was a singular sight, this heavy coach dragged toward the group at bay like some war machine. As it was large enough to mask all the enemy, they had not failed to profit by it; the driver alone was exposed to shots. He was a strapping fellow, in the scarlet uniform of the Croatian Hussars, and with perfect calm he whipped up the horses and urged them on.

"I am going to take care of you, my brazen Jehu," muttered Ratibal, cocking his carbine.

"Whip behind, Jarvey, whip behind," screamed Cocagne, in the tone used by the boy in the dust to incite the coachman to lash the luckier urchin clinging to the footboard.

At this grotesque outburst, Cornet Boissier could not refrain from laughing, although the situation was not a humorous one. When within fifty paces of the French, the improvised battery stopped and presented its side like a ship of war about to deliver its broadside. Five or six musket barrels were thrust out from the carriage body, and the captain was about to order fire to be opened on them when a white figure appeared at the window.

"Oh, there's my daughter!" exclaimed the farmer.

"The cunning fiends," growled Champoreau; "they are making a buckler of the girl to stay our fire."

That was the foe's intention, on the principle that as all is fair in war, the use of the fair one was praiseworthy. Held from behind by unseen hands, the farmer's daughter was thrust into the doorway of the "calash," so that it became next to impossible for her friends to shoot without hitting her. This infernal scheme must have been preconcerted, as the driver leaped nimbly to the ground, unharnessed the teams at the traces in a twinkling and hastened to ambush himself with his comrades behind the vehicle. In the surprise, no one thought of firing at the horses, so that they, as well as their masters, were covered before the little troop could get off a shot.

"Come, come," said the captain, "it is going to be a siege, a fort against a redoubt! We were foot-soldiers and now we become engineers, and if it keeps on——"

He did not finish the sentence, as a bullet glanced off his helmet and made him stagger as though he had received a cuff on the ear. At the same instant, Ratibal's charger, forming the end of the line, was hit in the thigh and desperately lashed out with its hoofs. The enemy did not shoot very accurately as they were under cover, but it was easy for them to improve by degrees on their aim, and the resisting handful's total destruction was merely a question of time.

Recovering from the shock, the captain leveled his gun in a fury, and shouted:

"You bunglers, I'll teach you to spoil our caps!"

But Albert seized his arm before he had time to pull the trigger and diverted his attention to the peasant. Pale and with clenched teeth, the unhappy father was convulsively clutching his gun-barrel, as he stared fixedly before him; his eyes were too fiercely hot for tears to dwell in them. The smoke which had enwrapped the carriage after the discharge, was fading, so that the girl re-appeared, motionlessly shielding with her frail form the merciless Huns from the Drave and the Danube. She did not scream or struggle, but awaited death from her countrymen's hands with a martyr's resignation.

"No, no," pleaded the youngest dragoon.

"I cannot risk killing a woman," angrily said the captain, though he raised his firearm again. "It is all very fine, young sir, we shall not fire; but you can prepare to mount guard at the pearly gates of Paradise. Before ten minutes, the Seventh Dragoons will have vacancies for two officers."

"Ay; and there'll be an opening for a drummer-boy in the Ninth Foot—a terrible void to fill, though I say it, who shouldn't," added the town boy's mocking voice.

Two shots punctuated this jest. It was evident that the enemy had adopted a slow but sure method; they were firing by relief-files so that they saved in powder as in men. This time, the farmer was hit in the shoulder and the captain's mare, struck full in the chest, dropped in a lump. The living wall was breached and, by this gap, the foe, if the inclination

were not lacking, might have carried the little band by assault.

"Close up," commanded the captain, catching Ratibal's horse by the reins to bring it back.

Albert executed the same act with his, so that the rampart was formed anew, and the defenders, however serried their little rank, had barely room enough for cover. Lecomte did not even think of binding up his wound, though it bled profusely; he wished he were dead as he gazed on his daughter.

Lying on the reddened grass, the captain's charger writhed in the last spasms.

"Poor Talavera!" sighed the old dragoon while the beast expired; "That jade saved my life at Salamanca and Victoria. Somebody will have to pay for her hide, dearly."

He was still struggling with his emotion when he felt a tug at his sleeve. Quickly turning, he faced Cocagne who had resumed the vertical position.

"What do you want?" he challenged in anything but an inviting tone.

The drummer pointed to the hillside beyond the village. On the summit, a dark mass stood out in relief like a melted patch in a snowfield. The cornet, who had spent his latter time in the college classrooms and exercise-yard, would have taken this hazy shade for a range of bushes, but his superior's eye, trained in a score of continuous campaigns, could not be so deceived.

"Troops," he said.

"And on the march," tranquilly subjoined the boy.

If the patch were watched, it could be seen to move.

"This scamp from Paris is right," growled the veteran; "there are troops coming up, but who do they belong to? If to the allied armies, our accounts are settled."

Cocagne said nothing, but his eyes spoke for his tongue; they expressed such a longing to laugh that Champoreau gave way to wrath on the instant.

"Do you take this to be funny, you rogue?" he questioned, shaking him by the collar.

"Don't be cross, captain; but I ought to be acquainted around here, as my mother came out of Champagne, and I used to run out here for the fruit season. I know that, in front of us, beyond Eclaron, is the St. Dizier road, and that's the place where the Emperor slept last night."

"In fact," the old officer reasoned, in a low tone, "if the enemy retired on Brienne so hastily, it was from having the emperor so close to their coat-tails. That may be the Imperial Guards coming up yonder."

"They were Austrians who passed Montier," said the farmer, "and they who fell on my farm were the rearguard."

"To say nothing of my catching the sound of a French bugle call."

It was Ratibal who spoke, and, indeed, the breeze brought at intervals the flourishes of a clarion; Boissier, in his early experience, had often enough heard

that shrill wail, calling in the stragglers whom the cavaliers of the Ukraine prevented responding, and he shuddered.

"Now is the time to evacuate our post, my boys," remarked the captain. "We must scramble into the woods and keep up the firing until our vanguard relieves us."

The cornet and the trooper prepared to execute this order, but the farmer and his nephew did not budge.

"Thank you for all you have done, officer," said the farmer. "Save the men, but I am going to stand and stop a bullet."

"Not a bit of it, Father Lecomte," interrupted Cocagne; "you cut away with the dragoons, and leave me to bring back Therese all by myself."

Without waiting for a comment on this extravagant boast, the saucy boy, lying prostrate, began to creep toward the vehicle.

"Where can this little crazy-head be off to?" wondered Champoreau.

For a short space curiosity made them forget the danger, and all wistfully watched the urchin's foolhardy adventure. He dragged himself on hands and knees with incredible speed, as though he had always traveled on all-fours. The Austrians were continuing their firing with the same methodical slowness, and the latest leaden missiles had wounded Boissier's steed, but as they had to fire across the carriage, they could not depress the muskets sufficiently to hit a man. Flat upon the sward, Cocagne

escaped their bullets, and the nearer he approached the calash, the better he was sheltered.

"Is he not sly, the little toad?" ejaculated Rati-bal in admiration.

"But how will he get out of the scrape?" queried the captain, so absorbed in the sight that he forgot to attend to the conduct of his petty troop.

Without accident the boy managed to reach the vehicle, and they saw him slip into a basket under the box, a "boot" for carrying odds and ends in, such as the tools for repairing damages to the coach or the harness.

"All that he gets by this is to be carried off by the Austrians," muttered the captain. "That is a backhanded way of capturing them."

While the Parisian boy was accomplishing his perilous task, considerable movement had taken place by the vehicle. Therese Lecomte was no longer in sight at the window, as the two soldiers who had been holding her dragged her down by force upon the back seat, where they placed themselves beside her. At the same time they shut the windows. Evidently they had descried the French vanguard out Eclaron way, and they were making ready to depart. In a thrice the horses were put to, the traces adjusted, and the lath-like soldier who had driven was installed with the lines again.

"Aim at the horses," shouted the dragoon captain.

All four aimed together, but none of them fired. Before the driver had time to square his elbows, up popped Cocagne above the springs and

over the spatter-board through the opening at the back of the driver's seat-box; grasping the whip-lash and the man's slender leg, he shook him off his balance, as much by the surprise as by his strength, and hurled him off into the grass. This feat was performed with the agility of an acrobat and the briskness of a monkey. The friends of the fallen were still wondering how it had occurred, when the boy, picking up the reins, smacked the whip over the four horses like an old royal coachman, and screamed ear-splittingly:

"The lightning coach for St. Dizier! Your sort can come after by the slow coach."

The scene had changed like one in a pantomime. Swept away by the double span, the calash left the Austrians without shelter. They shook in stupor while unknowing which way to turn. A few had the presence of mind to shoot after the flying coach, but their snap shots did not strike it, and it continued its mad course. The amateur driver crossed the meadow as though he had "tooled" four-in-hands all his little life, and as soon as he struck the road he directed his steeds toward the village. The trick had been played with such boldness, and there was so much audacity in the impromptu charioteer's attitude, as he was obliged to stand up to manage the lines, that the beholders on his side sent up a cheer.

"Degrade me if he is not sharper than the whole company of us," said the captain. "The boy is bringing you your daughter sure enough."

The farmer could not get out a word; he was choking with gladness.

"Suppose we help him a trifle," observed Ratibal, raising his gun—a speech and an action quickly understood.

Four shots, going off like one, overthrew three of the living targets, among them the tall coachman, just rising like Phaeton after his fall through Apollo-Cocagne.

"Well, there's one that will do no more driving," was Champoreau's remark; "that will teach him not to elope with young girls."

The rest of the troop fell back under cover of the trees. Their officer alone showed himself as braver and more intelligent. He was near enough for his splendid uniform, his bearing and almost his features to be distinguished. He was a very fair young man, jauntily wearing the tight-fitting jacket and the loosely slung outer jacket, slashed and richly trimmed with gold braid; a gold cord and tassel decorated his high shako, and his sinewy legs in scarlet tights held him gracefully and yet firmly on his fine bright bay horse. He wavered for a second as he saw Cocagne reach the Eclaron road, but almost simultaneously he pricked in with both gilded spurs, and started, with a brandished saber of Oriental type, in pursuit of the coach.

"Whither is the *Redbreast* going?" grumbled the dragoon; "he flies so fast that I cannot hit him on the wing."

"Never fret, captain," said Ratibal, lightly, "bet-

ter trap him for the caged life. Let our skirmishers take him—there they come already at the end of the village.”

“Truth to tell,” proceeded the officer, “he is tricked out like some dandy officer of the Imperial staff, and our Emperor might not be sorry to catch an officer of his rank.”

The dragoon had made a mistake and he speedily perceived it; the Scarlet Hussar’s charger had a pace far superior to that of the heavy Mecklenburg beasts hauling the calash. He flew like an arrow, and would in a few seconds catch up with the equipage.

“Run over him, boy!” shouted the captain to the driver, who was already too far to hear him.

Ratibal begged the fires of Hades to burn his boots, and used other execrations fit to make a heathen blush. Breathless with emotion, Albert and Father Lecomte followed with their eyes, in the utmost anxiety, the incident in progress on the highway.

The drummer had left his gun behind him when he started to crawl out to the vehicle, and he bore nothing in the way of a weapon save the whip, which, however, he wielded handsomely, lashing out at his pursuer as well as at the horses. But the light cavalryman managed his Arab with marvelous dexterity. Having shot ahead, he swayed about in the saddle, as supple as a serpent, to avoid the lash, without running in to cut Cocagne down. Plainly, he was seeking to bar the way of the carriage.

Such a one-sided conflict could not last long. The trumpets of the French vanguard were distinctly audible when the carriage reached the first houses of the villages. At this the boy, to put an end to the race, turned to the left, hoping to upset the cavalier, and perhaps throw him under the hind wheels. But this movement decided his fate in the singular struggle.

The skillful equestrian saved himself by making his bay take a monstrous side leap, and profiting by the conveyance losing impetus, he dashed at the leaders' heads and commenced to goad them with his saber in the flanks. They reared, left the straight line, finally wheeled, and getting the bit in their teeth, looked the coachman in the face and defied him to direct them. Almost lifted off the ground by the maddened beasts, the vehicle returned like a whirlwind on the route just traversed.

Cocagne now stiffened his weak arms to control the creatures which he had incited before, while the Red Hussar, tearing alongside at a fiery gallop, plowed up the crupper of the horses. It was like one of those wild hunts depicted in old German prints, and the scarlet rider resembled Mephistopheles as he careers with Faust to the Witches' Meeting on the evil night.

Mute and spell-bound, the French had witnessed this weird spectacle. Not a sound rose from their group—not a gun spat fire; brave though they were, they were all petrified with surprise and sorrow. Still was the contest prolonged, and the heroic boy

held out with all his powers; but within twenty paces of the wood, snap! went the lines at the strained buckle.

All was over. With increased fury, the Scarlet Hussar goaded the team which the lad could no longer constrain. With a roar like thunder, the coach plunged into the wood-enclosed road through the forest and disappeared under the trees.

The captain and his dragoons stared at each other without venturing to speak. Albert quivered with more agitation than when he had first heard bullets whizz. In his despair the farmer flung down his gun, and his haggard eyes rose heavenward as though beseeching its power to restore his child.

"This is carrying the joke too far!" said the captain at last with concentrated rage.

"Ah, and the Parisian joker," added Ratibal: "Burn my boots if he has not snatched him up from under our noses. I'd give a year's pay to see him again, the sharp little weasel!"

"Might we not ride after and overtake the coach, captain?" inquired the cornet.

"Ride, on what?" retorted his superior, ill-humoredly. "Do you not see that my poor Talavera has received her last blue pill, and that Coco has a ruined leg?"

"I'll go alone if need be," quickly returned Albert.

"That's no new way to get yourself killed, and the Seventh Dragoons have not too many officers at present. Please me by reining in your impatience."

But as the speaker no doubt saw on the youthful face what sincere sorrow he felt, he added in a milder voice: "My dear Albert, you will have plenty of opportunities to have your head split before the campaign ends, and those who love you will not forgive me pushing you into danger for nothing."

At this, the hearer reddened like a girl, for he could hardly be accused of home-sickness who was without parents, and who had never up to this day noticed a woman as worthy of love.

"I thank you for that, young sir," said the farmer, holding out his hand with straightforwardness affecting the young officer; "to me alone should fall the task of avenging my daughter."

"I undertake to give you the chance, my honest friend," said Champoreau; "come with me and I will put you in some place attached to the army. If the Emperor had a hundred thousand trumps like you, we would soon turn down these kings and knaves. Take my saddle and bridle, Ratibal, put them on Coco's back, lead him along, and let's be off."

"We shall just nick it, captain," said the trooper, as he executed the orders. "Here's the pickets of our van coming out of Eclaron."

The little party crossed the meadow alongside the road. Albert did not care to remount, and the captain was obliged to him for the courtesy, as the death of his charger had temporarily relegated him to the infantry. Sad and gloomy, the homeless farmer followed.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE IMPERIAL PRESENCE.

When the four reached the main road, the French skirmishers were streaming out of the hamlet in irregular bodies, altogether opposed to the close order of the Austrians whom they had lately opposed.

"Halloa, these are the Marie-Louises," exclaimed Ratibal.

Boissier recognized the uniform of the Young Guard's flanking companies, thus nicknamed after the Empress-Regent, Maria Louisa of Austria, under whose patronage they were raised and organized. Considering her nationality, this was a sarcastic fling at the alliances which Napoleon had forced the rulers of Europe to make with him in his halcyon days. These light troops were mostly raw recruits, conscripts, or drafted men, weakly and ill-clad, who seemed in no condition to dispute with Saxons and Teutons. Still the raggedest uniform and the frailest frame may cover an ardent heart, and on these smooth faces one might read intelligent recklessness and joyous courage. They did not march with the clockwork movements dear to the old school of Melas and Frederick the Great, but swung along with a free and easy step, roaring at the top of their voices a popular song which accompanied these young soldiers into the hottest fire.

Friends, when we stop marching,
It's Fanchon we'll toast,
She works at clear-starching,
But fun she likes most.
She's fond of deep quaffing——"

So sang these poor lads who had scarcely anything to drink or eat over night; but when they struck up the chorus, their laughs and jests burst out without end:

"She's 'fond of deep quaffing, good supper,
Good supper, gay ball,
And sings when not laughing,
And that's like us all!"

Such a strain on this plain desolated by war rose like a protest of the undying Gallic gaiety. These jolly scouts passed the little party without paying them much heed, being well accustomed to see wounded horses and dismounted officers. After the outlyers, trotted a squadron of *Guides*, with horse-pistol in hand, who preceded a cluster of horsemen, some of whom wore very splendid uniforms.

"Here's the Emperor," called out Champoreau and Ratibal at the same time.

Boissier had seen the Emperor in his furred coat, in a sledge, on his *via dolorosa*, beyond the Russo-Polish border; he had seen him distribute medals and diplomas at the college, and also, at a greater distance, in the Carrousel square, Paris, reviewing troops, the center of a glittering swarm, while the regimental brass bands played and the multitude cheered. The scenes were altered with a vengeance,

and the return from Russia was almost repeated. Napoleon advanced solitarily with his white charger going at a walk; the brow seemed weighted with care so that the head hung forward, and his body showed enervation. The small cocked hat was on his head as worn by the Imperial Guard Chasseurs, with their white and green uniform, but the long-skirted riding coat, the *redingote gris*, concealed his epaulets and the medals and decorations. The radiant Cæsar had once more become the plain, stern fighting general, shorn of the gold and purple, and without the applause, silenced by the cannon roar.

The staff followed, as moody and silent as the supreme chief. So had the youngest soldier seen them, with their proud plumes clipped by the bullets of De Tolly and Kutusoff, swathed in fragments of horse blankets, riding scraggy steeds, hurrying on from the Cossack lances, with the red fire in the east where Moscow had been. Their fagged horses now again stretched their necks downward: wearied by twenty years of victory, omitting the wreck of the Grande Armée, these old men bent in the saddle, and envied this youth, and these boyish beginners who could sing of love and glory, and of the love of glory. In this dreadful campaign, in which France threw and lost her last stake, none but the young were lightsome.

When Albert came out of college he leaped for joy at donning the fine dress, reminding him of the portrait of his father; he dreamed of conquering charges, swords flashing in the sunshine, the trump-

ets' sonorous blare, the rattle of the drums, the intoxicating odor of burning gunpowder—but already his heart was sinking to see these venerable marshals stealing by, dull and morose. The picture of their trampled country seemed looming up before their hopeless eyes, and the young lieutenant understood soon what was war on one's own hearth, as clearly as Lecomte. He was so depressed that he omitted the regulation salute, and the captain was obliged to remind him of his duty by a vigorous nudge with the elbow. The two officers stood side by side on the roadside. A little to the rear, Rati-bal held the horses. Leaning on his gun, old Lecomte had remained on the meadow, with his eyes fixed on the woods where the carriage had disappeared.

The Emperor stopped his horse and looked the dragoon captain squarely in the face.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" he bluntly demanded.

"Pierre Champoreau, captain, Seventh Dragoons. I come from Spain, and I am to join Milhaud's division."

"And this young man?" continued Napoleon, in a sharp, well-articulated voice.

"Sire, my name's Boissier—Albert, same as my father's, died from wounds received in battle." He had the tact not to particularize. "Your Majesty appointed me to the same dragoon regiment a month ago."

"Your father fell in Russia," said the great man

without a break of the voice—that disastrous campaign was so far distant now. “Would he were by your side, and mine, now! But you are also the nephew of the banker of that name?”

“Yes, sire,” with indifference, for, spite of his rich uncle’s kindness, he had always scorned the working-bee who had stayed at home to gather money while the soldier-bee was scorched in the flames remote from the hive.

“He is a sterling patriot, like the other, though they served in opposite ways. He has given a hundred thousand francs to the Treasury, and he asked for an epaulet for you. All you have to do is to deserve it.”

“Sire, I vow I will!” exclaimed the youth in enthusiasm.

Napoleon let the ghost of a smile steal over his marble lineaments; among these tired, silent, almost dismal generals, his oldest, it was a joy to see this ecstasy of his youngest soldier.

“How do you both come to be unhorsed?” suddenly inquired the Emperor, after a pause.

Champoreau judged that the order of grades called on him to reply, so he explained:

“Sire, we were attacked by an Austrian detachment pillaging the farmhouse yonder on the right, and my horse was killed.”

“I hope you hit back?”

The captain silently pointed to the corpses strewn the plain. For an instant the Emperor regarded these tokens of bitter resistance, and his eyes

assumed an expression marking more geniality than since Russia had been brought into the conversation.

"How many were you?" he asked.

"We three, a drummer-boy of the Ninth Foot, who was taken prisoner, and this farmer, who fought like a soldier."

"Step this way," said the Napoleon to Lecomte, who mechanically obeyed. "You are a brave man, and I shall give orders for you to be compensated for your losses. Ask me for anything you like."

"I want only vengeance," responded Therese's father in a hollow voice.

The monarch started and fastened on the peasant the eye accustomed to read the human heart.

"Were they all cast in this mold, France would not need me to save her," he muttered.

The son of the soil did not flinch; he sustained with steadiness the glance which had intimidated kings.

"Do you know the countryside?" inquired Napoleon, after a moment's thought.

"For twenty years I have been carrying on the corn trade, and there is not a road in Champagne that I have not been up and down a hundred times."

"Then you know the shortest cut to get through the Montier forest?"

"As well as I know what the Red Hussars and the sheep-coats have taken from me," replied Lecomte bitterly.

"'Tis well. I depend on you to serve as guide to the army, and you shall go with the vanguard. To-morrow you shall have equipment, and I warrant

that you shall be set face to face with those who burnt your farm."

"Thank you, my Emperor," replied the peasant, whose eyes sparkled at the prospect.

"Captain, ask for a charger of my first groom this evening, and meantime, till you can join your regiment, serve with this young son of a memorable officer, in the cavalry on my escort duty."

"Yes, sire," answered Champoreau, with most military conciseness.

Half mad with joy, Albert began to shout: "Long live the Emperor!" and Lecomte, who had suddenly found his spirits again, stepped out briskly to catch up with the cavalry of the fore-guard. Napoleon started off at a trot, and the whole staff passed rapidly. The cornet was already in the saddle, and Ratibal set to loading up Coco with Talavera's caparisons. He had not waited for any order to give up his horse to his captain.

"Come, come," said the latter, "I won't have you try to keep up with the procession on foot. I will speak to some military train officer to give you a lift in a wagon."

"Stop there, sir," said Ratibal, "a dragoon of the Spanish war in a wagon? I never saw such a thing! I would rather trudge along, particularly as it is going to rain pretty soon, and Coco's saddle will do for an umbrella."

He was speaking more correctly than most weather prophets, for the sky had clouded, and the dry and chilly air of the morning changed with the

wind, which was becoming westerly. Ratibal put the saddle upon his head and sturdily tramped off, exchanging jokes about his headgear with the foot-soldiers whom he met. Captain and cornet marched in the skirt of the squadrons "on Imperial service," as the Emperor's bodyguard was styled; and Champoreau was instantly recognized by brother officers not seen since the 1807 campaign. Albert was astonished at the cordial simplicity with which these veterans of the Napoleonic armies hailed each other when meeting after dispersal on all the battle-fields of Europe. Whether they came from Spain or Russia, they merely called out a name or a nickname, grasped hands, and falling into step in time side by side, they resumed a chat interrupted years before at Eylau or Friedland. He listened with the charm of novelty to reminiscences of sunny Salamanca, while those of ice-bound Russia awakened memories of sadness since the Emperor had called his father an officer who dwelt in his mind; these men spoke of the far marches as a townsman boasts of a trip into the suburbs. One feature deepened his sorrow at his loneliness; it showed that he stood not alone as a kind of ward to the great general. The dialogues brought up terse phases that afforded food for the amateur of slaughter.

"What's become of Gourand, who exchanged with you out of the Tenth Lancers?"

"Killed at Badajoz," replied Champoreau; in his turn inquiring: "Hear anything about Pascal, adjutant-major of the Twenty-fifth?"

"Marked off 'missing,' between Smolensko and Wilna," tranquilly rejoined a lieutenant, who was old and grey-moustached.

"Alas," said Albert, to the surprise of the bystanders, who could not conceive how this youth could be affected by this tidings.

But Major Pascal was one of those who had shared horsesteak with the boy, and it was while reconnoitering around the bivouac, where a handful of soldiers of all arms protected the Son of the Regiment, that he was lost among the Cossacks, who surrounded these chance encampments like robber-wasps the beehives. Needless to say this discovery that the supposed novice had been almost cradled on a caisson and nursed on the march, placed him in a different light to the fresh youth from the college, whom these men, whose school was actual warfare, despised.

A torrential rain came down to damp the enthusiastic welcome. The riders huddled up in their cloaks, and thought of nothing but how best to bear up against the showers promised during the last hour. They were now in the forest, and the road, bad enough all along, became abominable. Suddenly soaked, after a long frost, it yielded to the hoofs, and the ruts, graven by the German batteries, changed into wallows. Albert had much difficulty in keeping his horse up, as it slipped at every stride, and as the icy chill penetrated to the bone, he fell to thinking more and more vividly of his father and his mother, victims of a war of invasion, only they

were on the losing side. Might he not end as one of the defeated likewise?

Champoreau had lit his pipe and was silently puffing. Ratibal and Lecomte, going with the vanguard, had been lost to sight.

It took five hours to flounder through the woodland, and night was closing as they reached Montier-in-Der. This large village bore traces of an army's passage, and all was in the most frightful disorder. The chief officers had much trouble to get lodgings, and most had to content themselves with an inn's main room, out of which the doors and windows had been torn away. They gathered before a large fire fed with broken stuff of all sorts, and each set to drying his garments.

Stiff from cold, Boissier had not a thought for the morning's events when his eyes caught an inscription scratched with the prong of a broken fork, or the like instrument on the mantel-piece skirting-board. Mechanically approaching he read as follows:

"I am Therese Lecomte of Eclaron: abducted by Austrian General Krumer; taken to Brienne."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MILITARY FOP.

Assuredly, Albert had not fallen in love with the girl, just visible through the musket smoke, still he was so young that a heroine completed the poetic side of a picture, in which the background and horrific features were too prominent. His mother was a vision of pathetic grace, and his earliest acquaintances of the sex were the ministering angels of the hospitals on that long line of refuges for the wounded from the banks of the Borodino to those of the Seine. He respected all women, and admired such devotees of the religion of humanity.

The girl had traced this appeal for her father, or at least, for the peasants with whom she had been reared; scarcely for the officers whom she hardly had known to be trying to rescue her. But it was well for the young officer to have his country personified by this country lass.

He imagined her pent up in Brienne, bullied by the blustering soldiers from whom he was destined to deliver her by some daring if not very subtle stroke of war. He would appear with uplifted saber, and she would rush toward him in one of those semi-classical attitudes shown in the prints after David, of the period.

The captain's rough voice broke in to throw some coolness on the rising flame which colored the fancy.

"Well, my boy, what do you think of the broth?" with a broad laugh; "I suppose you can decide whether it is mutton, or horseflesh, like that you regaled on in the White Czar's hospitable realm."

"I am quarreling with nothing, captain; I was wet, but my cold has gone and I am ready to begin again."

He shivered, but it would be most ridiculous to show his feelings before these hardy soldiers who kindly regarded him as a son of their own. He stood upright with a clank of his sword. He also thought fit to keep to himself the sentimental ideas filling his head, and he refrained from pointing out the inscription.

"To-morrow," he thought, "I will warn Father Lecomte, and aid him to recover his daughter."

"That's the talk, youngster," said Champoreau; "traveling shapes youth, and before three months you will sleep at a camp-fire like an old one. Meanwhile, I want to know what we shall have for supper."

This prosaic reflection reminded his pupil that he had not eaten since morning and was dying of hunger. The dragoon's uneasiness was shared by all his fellow-officers, and there was a chorus of imprecations against the enemy for having ravaged the country before they could despoil the peasants.

"Any one can see that they are playing the return-march," observed an old captain of skirmishers; "they are treating us as we did them in 1806."

"Bah! they would act just the same if we had respected their fields and barns," retorted his lieutenant.

"To tell you gentlemen the truth," said Champoreau, "we were no better off in Spain. I learnt in that dog's own country to draw my belt tighter every night when the rations were short, and those days came around altogether too frequently. But I should not care if my orderly were only here—he's the sutler to provide victuals!"

"Indeed, what has become of him and the countryman?" asked the cornet, looking for some round-about way of inquiring after Therese's father.

"He is hunting for us, of course; and with such weather as I would not shut the door on old Marshal Blucher himself, he will have his work cut out to find us."

"Pshaw! our rifles are *rifling* in the suburbs," responded a light infantry officer, "and they will drop in some time with chickens and bacon."

"I hope so," said Champoreau, persistently, "but I would rather have my good old Ratibal here."

"Present, captain!" said a ringing voice, as the dragoon showed himself in the doorless doorway.

His sudden appearance was hailed with general glee on its being seen what he brought. A fat hare swung at Coco's stirrup-iron, as the soldier carried the saddle on his head; in addition, he held a bag in one hand which was knobbed with vegetables and potatoes.

"What do you think of the dragoons who warred in Spain, gentlemen?" cried the triumphant Champoreau.

"Long live Ratibal!" shouted the officers in unison.

"I knocked the hare over in its form in the woods, and our farmer comrade put me on to a house in the village where I should capture some."

"Lecomte?" eagerly inquired Albert, "why has he not come in with you?"

"He could not, officer of mine," rejoined Ratibal, blinking one eye and speaking with a knowing air; "he is in the Emperor's presence this quarter of an hour, questioned about the lay of the land. Our turnip grower seems to be cute, and knows a road by which we will make a short cut to catch the enemy."

"Unless they make away during the night," grumbled Champoreau.

"I must see the peasant again before we leave this," muttered the cornet, building the finest projects for the rescue of his first heroine.

"Room for the high cook!" gaily called out the captain, standing back from the fireside.

Ratibal was already beginning the preliminaries for the feast with ardor and dexterity, which were of good augury. The prospect of a hearty meal had restored good humor, and the chat revived merrily. The youngest present listened religiously to military tales which might lack literary form but had plenty of appropriate color. The finale was the Invasion and the chances of the war. Not one doubted the French would win, and the youth was particularly struck by the old war-dogs who had had been chased out of Russia, like himself, never despairing of the Chief conquered there - by "General Winter." In Paris, he had heard quite other language, and his

uncle had been considered hasty in making a donation to the treasury for the sake of the hero at bay, for whom his brother had died.

"Asking your pardon, gentlemen," broke in a shrill voice behind the conversationalists, "can I find a place at your fire without putting anybody to inconvenience?"

The half-circle before the fireplace parted to let an odd character pass through. He was a tall young man, with his lengthy frame enfolded in a long, full, blue horseman's cloak. His mealy, flabby countenance expressed dullness, silliness and vanity so plainly that the officers glanced at one another in consultation, whether they ought not to revoke the favor and expel the intruder for his face's sake.

"G-g-gentlemen," stammered the new comer, for he was so cold that he shook to the edge of his lips so that he could hardly speak, "I am an officer l-l-like yourselves, his majesty having appointed me, without asking if it suited, and I am to join the twelfth Hussars."

"Another gold-washed leaden coin," muttered Champoreau, "go it!" for he did not like these sons of noble or wealthy families, who were pitchforked into officerships in cavalry regiments. Albert was an exception, for he believed that the Emperor esteemed more highly the father's valor, than the banker-uncle's thousands, though it is debatable whether the latter were not more acceptable, certainly more tangible to quiet contractors with than the memory of valiant deeds at this

emergency. The new recruit had no points in common with the pupil of Champoreau. The latter had a fine appearance in the dragoon's uniform, but the other's pitiable mien ill-consorted with the jauntiness and fantasy of the hussar's. In all his garb was the neglect and the overdressing betraying the town fop's self-satisfaction. On examining this brand new outfit, knocked out of shape by the incidents of the journey to join his colors, one imagined under it the dandy of the period, in punch-flame waistcoat, cinnamon coat and walnut pants, the flower of elegance in 1814.

This amusing person stared around him with wondering eyes which finally fell upon Boissier.

"I suppose I can't be wrong," he faltered, "but have I not the honor to address M. Albert Boissier, nephew of the banker of that name in the Rue Mont Blanc—"

"The same, sir," replied Albert dryly, for he was not delighted by the recognition.

"Do you not remember we were school-fellows at the Lyceum. I am Agenor; Agenor Panardel; don't you remember now?"

"Nothing of the sort," returned the cornet, more and more coldly.

"How remarkable! I thought myself fairly well known in the world of fashion, too, and among the wealthy, also, for my father, who made a mint of money in—in the colonial trade (he came near saying, the slave trade) is rather rich; he twice bought substitutes to serve for me in the army."

"But I see you would not be thwarted any longer; you have become a sub-lieutenant, spite of him," Champoreau ironically commented.

"Oh, it was not my fault, and if I could have eluded it again I—"

"I am fully convinced," replied the old officer, gnawing his moustache; "but allow me to ask if your patriotic papa, who is so well off in colonial stores, remembered to put a few bottles of Jamaica rum in your saddle bags?"

"Sorry to say that he did not," sighed the gay hussar, giving a sidelong look at the roasting hare and the potatoes baking in the hot ashes; "but I have plenty of money, gentlemen, and I am ready to pay my share of the bill."

"How now? M. Agenor Panardel" roared the furious captain, "do you take a captain of the Seventh Dragoons for a sham-officer hired to cut a figure at a boarding-house table?"

On this terrible outburst the colonial trader's unfortunate scion lost countenance and began to babble apologies.

"Zounds!" still thundered the veteran, "do you believe you have any right to take better care of your carcass than we of ours, because you are a grocer's son? Do you fancy you can cut a dash as a hussar commander without getting a nick over the nose or an eye put out?"

"I do not want to command hussars or anything," faltered Panardel, abashed.

"I never thought you did! Egad! You are fitter

to lead a charge of the wooden horses of the roundabout in the parks! If France had many champions of your quality, the enemy would be at the gates of Paris."

In proportion to Champoreau's heat the prudent hussar edged toward the door, and he might have succeeded in darting out of it had he not been jostled by a soldier who rushed in, with a sealed despatch in his hand.

"Is Captain Champoreau of the Seventh Dragoons here?" he asked.

"I am the man," answered the captain sharply.

"An order from the major-general," said the orderly, holding out the message.

"A thousand thunderbolts," roared the dragoon, "I bet that I shall lose my supper." He read the letter. "I was sure of it. I come in worn out, have the luck to light upon jolly fellows, and a hot supper is just coming on the table, when—devil take it! I am ordered to set off on the march again!"

"What, must you go?" inquired Albert.

"Rather—on a confidential mission," grumbled Champoreau; "I know what that means, and for all that I shall get by it, I am willing to transfer it to another."

The cornet began to understand why these old soldiers were nicknamed the "soreheads," for their grumbling.

"Why, captain, if you think I am fit to replace you, I am quite willing," he said timidly.

Instead of calming the growler, this obliging offer only doubled his ill-humor.

"Heyday! do you think I would evade a regular order? However, if you are in such a fever to be marching, this will suit you, for you were to come along anyway."

"I?" said the astonished youth.

"Just you! Listen to this, which is clear enough for the blind," continued the captain, reading the official order:

"Captain Champoreau will take with him Sub-lieutenant Boissier, and another of the same rank at his choice, among those not yet attached to their regiments."

"Whereabouts are they sending us, captain?"

"You are very inquisitive. I don't know anything about it myself."

Unaccustomed to the laconism of war-office orders, the youth was confounded. Champoreau was chewing his moustache with vexation and letting his eyes wander round him with fury, when they happened to fall on the luckless Panardel. He had profited by the diversion to step softly into the street to elude the captain's anger, when the roaring voice riveted him to the spot.

"Halt! Sub-lieutenant Panardel, make ready to mount your horses!"

"But, captain, my regiment does not come up till to-morrow," whined the young man piteously.

"To-morrow is not this evening—and in the interval, I select you for this night service."

Panardel did not dare breathe a syllable, and satisfied with this outlet, Champoreau melted a little.

"Dear old comrade, we are not going to let you go famished," said one of the officers.

"The potatoes are done," said Ratibal.

"Very timely, for I am to take you, too."

"How about horses, captain?"

"Four fresh ones are at the door, brought by the orderly. Cram into the sack something to munch in the saddle, and let us be off. The boys will not have their appetites spoiled by our absence," concluded the dragoon, as he regretfully eyed the hare on the spit.

The officers came to shake hands with him, but their mouths were watering too freely for them to put any questions. At such times heroism is simple. Thus to start out was very natural to men risking their lives every day. Panardel was not of their way of thinking, and he blamed his gluttony for having led him into this doleful adventure. But all in vain did he cudgel his wits; he could not see any way out of it. There was no trifling then with discipline, and he understood that all the colonial merchandise in his father's storage houses would not prevent his being haled before the council of war in case of refusal of service. Having no alternative, he resigned himself.

Albert was ready from the captain's first words. He did not quit the hot fire and the appetizing feast without regret, but yet he felt proud at having been designated for the perilous errand, and had a vague

presentiment that it would be interlocked with the late romantic incident.

Champoreau rapidly reviewed his little troop, lit his pipe with the philosophy of an old hand, and proceeded out of the doorway with an eye askant upon Panardel.

In the street four fully-equipped horses were waiting, held by as many Imperial guides. The cavalymen examined them like a judge, and saw with satisfaction that good steeds had been chosen, vigorous and well rested, so that they might do much work in a short time. Each had a portemanteau at the hooks and pistols bulged out the holsters.

"Capital! the staff do their work first-rate," the captain muttered, "and it is a pleasure to charge into a sheaf of bayonets on horses like these."

Twenty campaigns in the cavalry had notably augmented the speaker's flesh, so he selected a dark bay with broad chest and short loins, apparently able to carry his weight. For Albert, who weighed little more than a jockey, he picked out a foxy red horse with fine legs and crane neck, which might readily do fifteen miles an hour, and he let Panardel and Ratibal settle between themselves about the last pair, good ones equally.

Agenor sighed as he bestrode his, but the delighted trooper declared that he had never had a better bit of horse-flesh between his boots.

"Where is our guide?" called out the captain when all were mounted.

A horseman who had previously kept in the

shadow came forward. The darkness prevented his features being discerned, but he wore a slouch hat so far from military shape that the martinet began to frown at being put under a civilian's orders for a time, when the stranger saluted him, saying:

"I am your man, captain."

Albert started on recognizing Lecomte's voice.

"Ha, ha!" ejaculated the leader, "it's our rural friend of fresh acquaintance. I suspected what was coming and I am not sorry, for he does not flinch under fire. Come hither my honest friend, and let us have a bit of a talk. The order says I am to reach the River Aube *via* Soulaines, Chaumesnil and Laroithiere, go down to Brienne and bring back a report to-morrow to headquarters on the enemy's position. I will take care of the military part of the task, but the route must be your business. I know more about the two Castiles than Champagne."

"You may rely upon me, captain," said Lecomte in a firm voice.

"Then take the lead, and off we go," said Champoreau.

The rain had ceased, but it was a dark, cold night. Fog steamed from the soaked ground and the roads were shocking.

A hundred paces from Montier they passed the outposts, and Boissier had a fresh occasion to admire the young conscripts, undersized and underfed, who slept soundly in the mire around the almost damped-out camp fires.

The little party took the road in an order reason

dictated; at the head the guide, between two of the escort; as a second rank, the captain and his two officers; as the rear-guard, Ratibal and the two riders of the Guides. Boissier would have preferred another arrangement, as he was fretting to communicate to the grieving father the clue he had read on the inn mantel board; but it was no proper time, and he had to resign himself until a better opening.

Nobody was in the mood to talk.

The captain silently smoked, and Panardel revealed his presence solely by the moans bumped out of him when his horse stumbled and shook him.

The village they quitted was situated on the forest edge, and a few clumps of trees sprinkled the plain on which they rode. As the road was not quite so plowed up, the captain quickened his pace. The party trotted on for two hours without seeing a light. Still it was not so very late, and houses were to be seen in the fields; but the inmates had no doubt been frightened away, as they did not hear the barking of watch-dogs, common on farms in all countries. Gradually the ground changed in character and the road began to wind up a hillside. On the right, dark masses loomed up. They were entering a wooded region.

"Halt!" commanded the captain, deeming it the time for a council.

The guide understood, for he came back to him.

"Where are we?" demanded Champoreau.

"A mile and a half from Soulaines. Presently we

shall leave the crossroad and strike plump on the causeway between Doulevent and Brienne."

"Keep your eye open, then, for Blucher and the Prussians were to cross the river there to-day."

"Blucher ought to have been on the river yesterday. It was the Austrians who formed the extreme rear-guard, and cover him."

This advice excited Boissier's attention.

"The rumor was that General Krumer was in command."

Krumer! The romantic youth thought at once that they might indeed meet the abductor of Therese.

"Krumer or Blucher, they are both enemies," said the dragoon, "and now we must move in military order. Close up the column, gentlemen."

The squad surrounded him and waited for orders.

"Cornet Boissier," went on the leader with the curt accent he reserved for weighty occasions, "I am going to send you out on scout."

Albert started with surprise and he would have been seen to blush if the darkness had not been so dense.

"Dismount; loosen your belt, throw off your cloak, take your pistols out of the holsters."

He briskly executed the command.

"Now, dive into the thicket and try to get close to the enemy's bivouac, without being caught. I give you twenty minutes to make the reconnaissance, and bring in the report. We shall see if you inherit the soldier's comprehensive look."

"I'll do my utmost, captain," said the youth, crossing the road.

"If they run at you with the cold steel, fire your pistols to notify us to dash off and save ourselves."

"I guessed that, captain," replied the cornet in a voice rather marred in smoothness by emotion.

"That boy will shape well in time," uttered Champoreau, who, in spite of his apparent roughness, studied his pupil with marked interest.

Agenor, who was keeping himself well behind his horse, having dismounted like the others to rest, raised his eyes to heaven and muttered:

"What a piece of good luck that this Turk did not pitch upon me!"

CHAPTER V.

THE SCOUT AND THE CHASE.

The young dragoon climbed the roadside bank and plunged into the underbrush. He had borne himself manfully before the soldiers, but he was deeply agitated. The captain's final address still rang in his ears and recalled the classical story of the Chevalier d'Assas, heroically giving the alarm to save the army from surprise, though surely to be slain himself. He felt no fear, but he was in the fever known to old soldiers as a flurry, analogous to the fright of novices on the stage or before large game. The morning's skirmish was not wanted to teach him not to duck his head to bullets, but it had not hardened him toward invisible dangers. He would have chosen a risk of bullets in the broad daylight to those from the unseen foe, perhaps hiding in the bushes of this sober wood.

Still, young though he was, he had resolved to offer up his life like his father had done, for glory. This word, turned into ridicule by burlesque verse since, was in full splendor in 1814. The bulletins of the Grande Armée were read out to school children, the country was believed in, and the race of exquisites had not produced many examples like Panardel.

So the youth kept straight on, bending his body, and stretching his gauntleted hands before him to

push aside the brambles from his cheeks. Under his boots the dry leaves squeaked and crackled, but the west wind roughly shook the old trees and drowned the tread of his feet in the sullen sough under the swaying limbs. The lower boughs caught the glimmer of watchfires, but the undergrowth was too thick for the scout to see the bivouac.

He increased his wariness as he neared the danger, and was on his hands and knees as he threaded the last screen separating him from the encampment.

At length, thrusting his head through the shrubs, he fully perceived a sight which would have been curious and entertaining under other circumstances.

The Germans from all lands had established themselves in a vast clearing illumined by their campfires. Around these piles on which whole trees were cast, the soldiers of the coalition against Napoleon, collected in small groups, were merrily and variously engaged. Some looked after sheep roasting on ramrods which certainly they had not paid the owners for; others crowded around casks of wine stove in and emptied by the tin cupfuls; some were dancing as men dance in the Black Forest, the Tyrol and even Wallachia, with the accompaniment of their own voices. It closely resembled the lively pictures of a Flemish Kermess.

The youth, fresh from the scanty supper of the French officers compelled to have some respect for their own countrymen's produce, contrasted the home guards fasting with this gorging of the invaders,

and he could see in it a realization of the Huns flooding Europe. But it was no time for musing, and he had to fulfill his errand.

He understood how important it was that his superior should know above all what was the strength of the body before Soulaines. It was difficult to calculate from the spot where he had stopped. The camp fires ran along far into the forest and at the end of the clearing, horses and guns might be discerned, he believed. If artillery, it would be at least a division, but Albert determined to make sure.

He resumed creeping toward the bivouac, using every bush to screen him, and without hindrance reached the border of the open space, where he could view the whole scene. Beyond the marching regiments were camped a squadron of Scarlet Hussars and a battery of six field-pieces. No more doubt could be had about the importance of the corps, and the happy novice might have returned to make his report when, a hundred paces on his left he noticed a brighter fire than the others. A ring of officers stood around the flames, before the opening of the only tent, surmounted by the Austrian and Prussian colors side by side; the interior was brilliantly lighted up. Albert was near enough with his young eyes to distinguish three persons sitting at a table. Strange at a war bivouac, the middle place was held by a woman in a showy dress, who did the honors. On her right was a man whose side-face alone was presented to the scout, but his decorations sparkled like stars in the sky.

"This looks like the senior general in command," reasoned the youth; "he is reckoning on staying awhile in France, say, in Paris, for he has brought his wife with him.

The guest was a tall young man whom he had little difficulty in remembering.

"Why, it's that Red Hussar who drove the calash off," muttered the sub-lieutenant, stupefied.

What had he done with the captive?

While putting this question to himself a white figure was outlined on the shadow within the tent, and he guessed that it was the farmer's daughter. She was standing behind the table, and the reason for her presence was not hard to define; she was waiting on the supper party.

Fallen out of the realm of romance, Albert was forced to admit that her captivity was explicable by a most prosaic reason. But other ideas came soon into his exalted brain.

"What could she do alone against numbers?" he thought, with profound feeling.

A touching incident came to prove that she had been forced in to menial service. The watcher was too far from the feasters to hear any words, but he did not lose any of their gestures. He saw the general take up a champagne glass and hold it out toward Therese, who stood motionless.

"He wants to make her drink to the downfall of her country!" muttered Albert, quivering with indignation.

And losing all self-command as he saw the

glass almost thrust into the girl's marble-like and unflinching face, he suddenly felt his hand become excessively rigid as he lifted the long pistol with which he had been fidgeting, and, with the coolness of his shooting in the college gallery, he fired. The bullet was marvelously well-aimed, indeed, for it shivered the glass stem just above the general's fingers, as Therese luckily recoiled with disdain, and so saved her face from even one of the fine splinters.

This rash shot drew from the two officers cries of surprise, while the sentries, here and there, shouted: "*Wer da?* who goes there?" and blazed away at the flash.

Luckily it went off where all the light shone, and the imprudent dragoon had also comprehended the challenge; he dropped on his breast and hid behind a stump which had freshly furnished its trunk to those fires. It was well for him that he was so quick, for twenty bullets impinged around him and one cut a twig not two inches above his helmet. The general discharge had aroused the camp. The supper tent was shut up at once by the canvas flap, and the revelers disappeared like characters in a shadow-play when the light is covered. The general had no intention of being a rifle butt, and the officers around the fire were running to their posts.

At the same time, all the sentinels on the edge of the clearing repeated the firing, as they had reloaded; so much the better as the smoke filled the air in addition to that from the fires. Shielded by the stump, the youth who had excited this salvo,

took a grim pleasure in listening to the grisly song of the lead, very melancholy when one is the object of them. He never forgets it.

A pretty way he was carrying out his commission! He had thought a good deal more of the girl than of the account to be rendered to his captain.

The movement in the camp soon recalled him to the gravity of his situation. The soldiers had sprung to the stacks of muskets, and what was more disquieting, the hussars were mounting. The cornet remembered none too soon that his comrades were awaiting him on the road, and he ran at the top of his speed through the woods, no easy matter in the dark, in high boots, and where was all unfamiliar.

"It would serve me right if they dashed off at once when they heard the alarm," he muttered, as he bounded like a buck over the lower bushes. He believed he heard the clank behind him of sabers against the stirrup irons, but for more assurance of sending the signal in time, he shouted with all his lung power:

"Here I am, captain!" and at almost the same time he leaped down on the road.

He was afraid that they had remarked that the pistol shot antedated the musket fire; but all Champoreau said was:

"Make haste, and don't be so noisy over it."

All the others were in the saddle; and Ratibal held the spare horse ready for Albert who sprang up without touching the stirrup.

"Here's your sword and belt," went on the cap-

tain in a voice which had become perfectly calm; "buckle on, put up your pistols, and tell me what is yonder."

"There she is there—in the general's tent," faltered the scout, scarcely recovering breath.

"What are you dinning into me about Therese?" exclaimed the old dragoon; "did I send you out to reconnoitre girls' schools?"

"But I mean the prisoner in the calash—your daughter," continued Albert, turning to Farmer Lecomte.

"Cornet Boissier," severely said Champoreau, "I order you to answer to the point. What is the force of the foreign detachment?"

"Captain, I saw cavalry and field pieces. I reckon a division is there at least."

"Very well; the horse will be upon us in five minutes, and your babble will perhaps cost us our lives."

"But, captain," stammered the cornet, glad at least that the whole truth had not come out.

Champoreau was not listening; he had turned to Lecomte to ask: "Is there any road straight to Chaumesnil without meeting these pursuers?"

On hearing his daughter's name, the pilot had turned pale, but he had not made a movement to quit the ranks, and he simply replied:

"We may go by the Soulaines causeway, but we must not lose a second."

On seeing this farmer forget his paternal sorrows in order to think solely of his country, Boissier

comprehended that true heroism is to be met later than in ancient history.

"Come along, boys—and you must race for it—at the charging gallop!" shouted the captain; "keep knee to knee with me, young sir, if you want me to overlook your pretty report. Only to think," he grumbled to himself, as he gave his steed the rein, "this is one of the promising lot, and has the right strain in him, and yet all he sees is woman when he goes out on scout. What can they teach these greenhorns at military colleges, anyway?"

The fusillade had ceased, but other sounds of evil omen arose from the hostile camp. Calls of command sounded amid sonorous neighs, and it was evident that the light cavalry would be sent out to investigate the thicket. One of the parties was already exploring the covert where the spy had been concealed. They could hear their horses snorting. The French were well enough ahead not to fear them, and were, besides, better mounted. They dashed off at full speed, and in a twinkling arrived at the road crossing another. On the left might be seen the apparently abandoned burgh of Soulaines, while on the other were the fires of the enemy's bivouacs. Here was the difficult pass to take.

The state of the ground did not allow them to turn into the village, and on the other side they might be taken in flank. But if they succeeded in passing the woods, they would reach a broad plain where the light cavalry might be distanced on so black a night.

Champoreau had closed up his men into a serried column; and he galloped at the head with Albert and the guide. Panardel, who longed to be on the further edge, was in the center beside Ratibal, where he never ceased to curse inaudibly at the stroke of fate which had placed him under so terrible a captain. He was the more vexed as he had scarcely sniffed at the supper which had lured him into the snare, and he was dying of hunger.

When the halt was made to let Boissier go on reconnaissance, our unhappy Agenor briefly entertained the hope that the chief would have the food distributed which Ratibal had provided, but the old dragoon had said not a word about eating, and the alarm had come to cut any gastronomical desires short. In spite of his wishes, the new-fledged hussar galloped on with an empty stomach, and he believed this would indispose him for heroic deeds. The consequence was that Ratibal watched him out of the corner of his eye, foreseeing that he had not the makings of a good soldier.

They went over three hundred yards of the way without impediment. The hussars were distanced, and Champoreau was curling his moustache in token of triumph, when a black body rose up at the corner of the woods.

"By Jupiter! they are there!" gasped the officer.

He saw only too clearly: the Germans had maneuvered very adroitly. While a squad had followed the fugitives along the cross-road, the main body had cut across by the shortest line to block the Soulaines road.

The little band was hemmed in. To turn and renounce the rest of the course was to lose the benefit obtained. Better, too, to try to cut through the troop opposed to them than flee to one side, where the infantry would have time to cut off the retreat.

Champoreau did not baulk at a decision for a moment.

"Draw, and at them, my lads!" he said, flashing out his saber; "those are the hussars, and we must ride over them."

Closely pressed together, the nine heavy cavalrymen came down with the swiftness of a broken waterspout upon the light horse. Panardel, solidly embedded in the band, had to obey the movement, and Lecomte brandished over his head a heavy staff, which was the only weapon he bore. Not expecting this united dash, the light cavalry were ill-prepared to receive the charge. Their line was too extended, and not deep enough to resist so compact a mass, and the latter went through it like a cannon ball. Intoxicated by the burst of speed, Boissier closed his eyes as he heard the wind roaring in his ears and as he thrust at the foe, when all but upon their swords. He felt a violent shock to his horse and another on his helm, but he had seen nothing, and he did not clearly know where he was when he heard the captain shout:

"Well done, youngster! Now then, ply knee and hand, and make your best time."

He turned, and saw by his side Lecomte, Cham-

poreau a little behind him, and the rest of the troop galloping at their heels, mixed with the hussars, who were following with wild screams in the Croatian tongue. But none stayed to fence with them; the question was one of swiftness. Each rider's safety depended on his horse's hoofs. Albert believed he might rely on his, which strode with incredible speed, and all he thought of was not to take the lead. The road was level and the gloom rather thick. Vaguely they distinguished the profile of the leafless lindens standing along the ditch like sentinels of a giant army.

Behind him he heard the hoofs throwing up the pebbles, a sharp rattling punctuated from time to time by the crack of pistol shots, or with a shrill yell, or a dull groan, as some one fell off his horse. The little squad lessened in number, while still the scarlet riders came on apace.

But the captain and the farmer kept in line, and the cornet looked to them.

Suddenly a roar of rage burst out on his sword-hand:

"Thunder!" It was his captain. "My horse is hit—I am gone down!"

Albert was going to rein in, when the voice continued:

"Cornet of the Seventh Dragoons, I transfer to you the command, and order you to finish the reconnaissance."

The pursuers were coming up in a body. There was a formidable crash, and out of the medley of

clashing steel Albert, driving in his spurs, heard these words still:

“The order ran: Chaumesnil, Larothiere, and return to headquarters by way of Brienne.”

In falling, the true soldier thought only of his orders.

CHAPTER VI.

ALL'S FAIR IN WAR.

The young commander profited by the disorder following the leader's fall to get a good lead. The final words had aroused in him a probably innate military instinct, that of soldierly duty. The youth understood that true courage may sometimes show itself when fleeing before the foe.

"I have a task," he mused, "and must carry it out at any cost."

He did not wonder how he was to extricate himself from the innumerable perplexities of a nocturnal scout, in a country where he had never been. Champoreau had bidden him to "go ahead!" and on he galloped as fast as his horse would carry him. The noble beast devoured space, as poets say, but the enemy were again in full chase, and their wild yells could be plainly heard.

"They have killed the poor captain," he meditated, and his heart was wrung at the thought that he ought to have defended him.

He had but to look back to see that the red horsemen were racing in a large body; their horses were not as good on the heavy soil as his, but they were in the greater number. By keeping the distance, all might go fairly, but the victory depended on his not making a slip. Moreover, the road was

no longer straight and smooth; it began to wind over the plain as country roads will do, and by the feeble starlight it was plain that pools of water bordered the highway. It ran through a swamp, and any one riding off the beaten track would intercept him who kept to the set way.

Boissier would not try the trick from his ignorance of the land, but the hussars were in sufficient force to risk the feat. There lay the worst danger, as the young commander saw so well that he never ceased to keep his eye on the plain.

After five minutes of this racing he believed that the pursuing column opened out a little. Each man was riding his own way and the better riders were coming to the front. Soon one of them darted away from the ranks and cut across the bow of the road in order to strike it again so as to bar it to the on-comers.

"If I do not get him out of that, I am lost!" said Albert to himself, as he cocked the pistol he had not fired.

This man from the rear crossed the marsh without the least hesitation and was bound to anticipate the cornet, who had only the resource of riding him down. But at this juncture a second cavalier also left the road and took to the swampy ground. Only he leaped to the opposite side to that chosen by the former.

"This is lovely," said the young officer, "this one is going to waylay me a little further on."

Now he had two to kill, and but one pistol; he

must use his sword on the second, who would probably have firearms. He blamed himself for not having reloaded.

As the dilemma became sharper the youth felt his energy grow. His ardor became a madness. The decisive moment was at hand, for the squadron came on, howling like wolves of the steppes, whose cry he seemed to recall, thirsting for his blood, while the solitary rider was already on the road before him. This was not ten paces off, and he was going to shoot, when he heard the well-known voice of Father Lecomte shouting: "Don't fire on me!"

While superexciting the imagination, extreme peril often makes the brain clearer and quicker to act. In a flash Albert perceived all. The man whom he had mistaken in the darkness for the enemy trying to waylay him was no other than the farmer, manœuvring to puzzle the hussars. Ten seconds subsequently the two Frenchmen were riding side by side.

"Listen to me heedfully, sir," said the peasant, without relaxing the pace.

"I am doing so and I shall understand," said the other, more bent on doing what he had been told than ever.

"I am going to continue to beguile them along the causeway, but you must dash right over the morass at the place which I shall point out to you presently. The strangers will not dare to follow you on account of the pools and they will stick on after me."

"I do not favor your dealing alone with the horde," muttered the youth.

"Do not bother about me; I undertake to baffle them on my own ground."

"But I will never flounder out of the bogs."

"Do you see the Charles' Wain?" said the farmer, as he pointed to the well-known constellation also called the "Dipper," or the "Wagon and Horses," which indicates by the pointer the North star.

"I do, though dimly."

"Keep straight on in its direction until you meet a little wooden house and a clump of pines. Wait for me there. I will join you in about an hour."

"But I really cannot abandon you thus!"

"It must be so," said the farmer's firm voice. "Together, we risk the destruction of both."

During this rapid dialogue, the horses had covered a hundred yards and more, and the horseman who had dashed off the road subsequently to the guide, could be seen galloping on the right. Albert pointed to him and was going to ask what his companion made of him, when the latter, instead of noticing, drove in both spurs, and cried out: "Here's the place to part. Push ahead boldly and do not quit the line to the 'Wain;' the ground is firm to the hut amid the pines."

The resolute tone decided the officer. He gathered up his horse and turning him to the right with one touch of the spur, he leaped bravely into the swamp. Water and mud splashed up, but the directions were reliable; the soil offered sufficient resist-

ance and he might gallop on without uneasiness. He dashed on for a few seconds before the horses of the hussars carried them on like a whirlwind and they disappeared in the night on the highway. The farmer's ruse had fully succeeded. Heated by the chase, the pursuers did not even suspect that one of the French had left the causeway. They had also paid no attention to the second rider diverging, who was rushing over the pools in the same direction as the dragoon, riding with great recklessness and uttering singular yells; these had not the Oriental twang of the Austrians or the guttural notes of the North Germans, and the hunted one was puzzled. It seemed as if the man was runaway with and was screaming for help. Indeed, while the cornet stuck to the line laid down, this quaint cavalier floundered about in the most whimsical zigzags. It was soon clear that he was not master of his horse and that it gave him too much to do for him to be dangerous. Nevertheless, he might do some harm in a collision, and Boissier was feeling the pistol priming before getting rid of this inconvenient neighbor, when a wail in French struck his ear:

"Help — help me!"

It was the unfortunate Panardel. In the meeting with the hussars, he had been lucky. Placed in the midst of the column, he had escaped the sword slashes, and all he received was a shock from a horse which had almost sent him out of his saddle. But having been carried through the line, his swinging jacket had been taken, in the dark, for that of

their own men, and again he was spared; but the horse had over-aided him in his wish to get away as soon as possible, by taking the bit between its teeth. So long as it carried him along the causeway, Panardel had not tried very hard to restrain it, but when it turned off upon the marsh, he had vainly endeavored to be the master. The madened steed curvetted fearfully, and splashed wildly through the pools, thick or thin. The danger had only changed in nature. Instead of falling under the Huns' saber strokes, Agenor risked being smothered in the mud.

"Oh, this way then; follow me!" shouted Bois-sier, at the risk of one of the pursuers who knew French, taking the hint.

But, while he compassionated the unfortunate rider, he had no time or means to help him.

The bemired man heard the advice clearly enough, but his steed understood nothing of the charitable appeal, and forced him into a quagmire where both sank.

The mishap was so sudden that the cornet did not perceive it for a while. But when he looked round and saw no man, he was going to stop; still he reflected that he had better reach the pine wood, tie his horse there, and return to assist his unfortunate brother officer. This appeared to reconcile duty with good fellowship, and so he continued to ride to the north.

Ere long a screen of large trees rose before him, and he recognized the place designated by Lecomte.

He drew rein, and was about to dismount when he spied a light beneath the trees. At the same time his ear was struck by a kind of faint groan. Both sight and sound seemed suspicious to the officer, who was becoming wary beyond his years.

Lecomte had spoken of a cabin, but not of its being inhabited.

Little more would have induced him to continue his journey. But he reflected that removing from the wood where the tryst was fixed was missing the farmer and blocking his chances to fulfill his charge. To observe the enemy without being captured and join his own army through their forces, required local knowledge which was lacking to the youth but was overflowing in the native.

"Besides I promised, and I must keep my word," mused the officer. "Again, there is our poor Panardel, in need of assistance, and I want to aid him to get out of the slough where he is mired down."

Fortified by this reasoning, he did not falter, but alighted, hitched his horse to a pine tree, and cautiously directed his steps toward the light.

The sound ceased at intervals, but it was resumed in the same melancholy tone. There was no mistaking the fact that it expressed human suffering.

Albert quickened his pace, and, after a few steps under the trees, perceived the cabin he had heard of. Four enormous pines had been used as they stood for the corner-posts of a shanty, the roof and walls having been coarsely made of large boughs. The light which had struck the soldier's attention

shone through the many interstices, and it was very easy to see what happened inside by going up closely.

The moaning had changed into a kind of rattle. The youth shuddered to think that a fellow-being was dying helpless in this loneliness, and he applied his eye to a chink. A lugubrious scene was lighted by the trembling rays of a pine-knot torch stuck in the ground.

On a heap of dry leaves, a half-clad man was writhing in horrible convulsions. He was alone, and the hut contained no furniture excepting a stool and a water jug.

The dragoon had no need to see more. He ran round the shanty, pushed open a door of pine slabs, and walked in. The wretch opened his eyes; his hands shook spasmodically; he tried to rise but fell back exhausted, and swooned. A gaping wound bored his bared chest, and the blood streaked his white skin. He did not appear to be a Prussian, although a blue cape with hood and a brass-hilted saber, flung into a corner, seemed to hint at that nationality as his.

Urged by pity, Albert fell on his knees beside him, shook him gently, and called him, using some words of German and of Russian, in his excitement, which he had acquired in his early vicissitudes. It was mercy's labor lost; the wounded man gave no token of life. Still he was not dead, as his hurried panting was audible. The dragoon had a canteen half full of brandy, which he put to the pallid lips.

Revived by the cordial, the wounded one opened his eyes and fixedly stared at the stranger who came to his succor. The latter's uniform seemed to surprise him, but he showed no fear.

"Drink away, my brave fellow," said the officer, forgetting that the other might not understand.

But to his astonishment, the supposed Prussian, after drinking a few drops of the cognac, said in French: "Thank you, monsieur. God repay you." Then, after a pause to collect roving thoughts, he added earnestly: "But you spoke Russian?"

"I was in Russia once--"

"That is better—" but here he nearly fainted; then, recovering with an exertion, he went on falteringly: "I am part Russ; I was a student at Heidelberg; my teacher of French was a compatriot of yours."

This was in French; the effort fatigued him, and during his unconsciousness, Albert examined him.

He was not more than three-and-twenty, with refined lineaments; his yellow hair curled naturally and his taper fingers indicated an aristocratic origin, so that the dragoon expected to find him a fellow-officer, notwithstanding his coat being of the coarse Silesian cloth in which Prussia clothed her soldiers.

The bullet which laid him low had entered the chest below the right shoulder and come out at the armpit; the blood had flowed in such abundance that the dry leaf bed was inundated. Boissier understood that the patient must die from this loss of blood, but still he thought of his traveling surgical



THE PRUSSIAN SAID IN FRENCH, "THANK YOU, MONSIEUR, GOD REPAY YOU."

case. Out of it he drew lint, bandaging stuff and compresses, and set to dressing the wound with some skill. Having staunched the blood after a fashion, he lifted up the soldier and set him against the wall. He appeared to breathe less laboriously, thus. A doubled cloth, dipped in cold water and laid on his forehead, completed the revival. He re-opened his eyes and offered his hand with a gratitude that touched the youth deeply.

"Do you feel any better?" inquired the dragoon.

"Easier," faltered the other; "but your attentions are useless; I am death-stricken, and have not an hour to live."

He was using French with an accent, but not that of the Germans.

"How does it come about that your comrades abandoned you in this way?" inquired the cornet.

"'Twas they who slew me," muttered the wounded man.

Boissier was perplexed, fearing that he had been alleviating the possibly deserved pangs of a spy or traitor; coward he did not think him. The sufferer must have read these thoughts on his face, for he gathered what life was left him to raise his voice.

"Listen to me; you who have trod my native soil, I care not in what guise—and when you hear my story, you will perhaps not refuse to do me a service."

"I promise to do for you all I can," replied Boissier, with tears in his eyes.

"I am a Russian on my mother's side, but was

born in Franconia, where my parents were sojourning, and I was studying at Heidelberg University when Germany rose against the French invasion at the commencement of 1813. I am named Hermann von Finkinstein. I loved a girl, whom I was on the eve of wedding, when I was claimed under the law as a Prussian born, and pressed into the *Landwehr*. She vowed to wait for my return, but when I did so, wounded in the battle of Liepzig, Wilhelmina had married."

"Your betrothed had married another!" exclaimed the cornet, interested as any youth is in love stories.

"She had betrayed her faith in favor of a Prussian officer because he was wealthy and had a high grade, and I learnt that she was going with him in the army hither."

"Women with the army?" protested the other.

"But he was a general," said the soldier, bitterly. "It is believed that we shall march straight on into Paris, and he, who wedded my Wilhelmina, expects to give her the sight of a military promenade."

"This is strange," muttered Albert, recalling the supper in the tent, where he had seen Therese insulted.

"I still loved her," continued the wounded one, after another sip from the flask, but in an enfeebled voice. "I quitted the *Landwehr* and joined the corps commanded by her husband, with the hope to be killed while she was looking on."

"Did she know you again?"

"Yes, she recognized me," muttered the dying

man, "for she issued the order that I should be murdered."

The hearer shivered with horror.

"Only an hour ago," resumed the soldier, "a man who had the right to command me, selected me to go with him on scouting duty around our camp. He is her familiar, a scoundrel who dishonors the officer's epaulets, and his name, Otto Minden, I want you to remember. Swear that you will retain it in mind!"

Albert nodded, not having the strength to answer verbally.

"As we entered this pinewood he coolly drew a pistol from his belt and shot me at point blank, saying: 'By order of the general.'"

"Infamous!" cried out the cornet, pale with emotion.

"I dragged myself in here to die, but with the hope that heaven would send me an avenger, and you will avenge me!"

"I swear it!"

"You will live—you will see the end of this war, and may meet the coward who slew me. Cast his crime into his teeth, and kill him like a dog!" This outburst had exhausted the sufferer. "Here," he gasped as he pointed to his splashed coat, "here is a letter and a miniture; some day hand them to Wilhelmina, and tell her that in dying I forgave her."

He frothed red at the lips; his eyes became dull, and a livid hue gradually overspread his face. His mouth opened once more to sigh—it was the last. Such deaths the cornet had not lately seen; the

others had been upon the field of action, and the fleeting intoxication of the burning gunpowder mantles the agonizing scenes; the soldiers slain before Eclaron had fallen lifeless, in Russia, almost all the fallen were half dead with cold and starvation before the bullet or the lance pierced them. But this was the struggle of the soul not to be torn from its earthly home. He watched on the countenance the gradual screening with that veil which is like a vapor tarnishing a mirror.

After Hermann had exhaled the sigh which carried away life with it, the witness remained confounded. Still he gazed on the corpse's contracted features which reflected the two feelings most vivid in man—love and hatred. The lips even now might open again to curse Otto Minden and call for Wilhelmina. But the poor deceived lover was certainly dead. The hand which the officer lifted fell back cold and rigid.

In the mournful silence, Alfred shivered in every limb, and he was rising to flee when he remembered the last entreaty. The ensanguined coat was at his feet, and the bullet that perforated it had allowed a scrap of torn paper to peep forth. Boissier had taken the oath, and despite his repugnance, he courageously explored the saddening garment, and took forth the letter and the likeness. The latter was intact, and the admirable face beamed forth, the hair flaxen and the eyes sky-blue, but a curve to the nose and a mouth too firm gave it a hard and haughty expression. The letter, written on time-yellowed

paper, was stained with tears. Albert opened it with emotion, and found that the pistol shot had torn and singed it: a piece had been carried into the wound: it was barely legible so that the Frenchman could make little of it save the signature: "Wilhelmina Lisdorf," in a strong, almost masculine hand; it must have been traced without feeling.

Albert placed these memorials of a fatal passion in the pocketbook he carried, while his eyes moistened against his will. He was thinking that he, too, might be pierced by a hostile bullet and die in a corner of the woods with no one to mourn for him, since Therese hardly could have distinguished him.

But he had been too early environed by deadly dangers to give way to weakness for any long time, and the feeling of self-preservation came back to him simultaneously with the desire of striking at the scoundrel who murdered a man at the behest of a worthless woman. In his wrath he commingled the ravishers of the farmer's daughter with the slayers of Hermann von Finkinstein, and he was easily led to assign to the unknown assassin the form and lines of the Red Hussar.

"I mean to be the death of him," he growled as he clutched his saber-hilt.

More easy to say this than to do it, for the situation was critical. Lost in the solitude, the cornet could only get out by the aid of Lecomte, whose return seemed more and more problematical. The countryman might be taken or killed by the enemy, in which case the young man stood poor chances of

safety. To ride in the night over the marshes without a route or a guide was to risk drowning in a pool.

To wait for daylight to pursue his mission was to insure its failure.

Deeply perplexed, he looked at his watch and saw it was near midnight. The hour appointed with Therese's father had long gone by. It was therefore likely that misfortune had attended him and that he would not come. Better attempt the night journey however perilous, than remain in this fatal hut. At an age under twenty, a man does not willingly keep the death-watch, and the youth felt distaste to being near the corpse whose twisted features and glazed eyes frightened him.

The silence on the marsh also was of evil augury as regarded Panardel: he must have been swallowed up by the mud, although it was more easy for a man to wade through it than a horse. He hoped, by leading his steed, to avoid the quicksands, the springs, and the quaking bogs, and not mount till he reached firm earth. Difficult and toilsome but possible, while taking much time. He would not dare use the road patrolled by the hussars, and he would have to wander at random.

Still the nights are long in the first month of the year, and he would have half-a-dozen hours before him of protective shade.

To reach the River Aube, he would have to go westerly. The Great Bear, serving as guide, sparkled in the sky, and by keeping it on the right, he was

sure to strike some part of the river which he hoped to recognize.

He gave poor Hermann a farewell look in his eternal sleep; the resinous torch was dying out and flickered on the dead face. Only now did the officer wonder why the light had been set there, and he concluded that the Prussian might have chosen it for an outpost. It might be occupied at any time.

To depart was urgent; he went out and turned to the spot where he had tied up his charger. He was somewhat astonished that he had not heard it neigh since he left it, and still more when he saw a void where it had stood. Thinking he was mistaken, he went from tree to tree, but it was useless. He saw no living thing on the edge of the wood, and had to acknowledge, under the weight of evidence, that the bright bay had disappeared.

The adventure was becoming fantastic, and he worried his wits to guess how the animal could have taken its leave. It had been fastened up too strongly to have wrenched away the bridle, and it could not have untied the knot! He was forced to believe that a man had been bold and cunning enough to steal it away.

With what view the cornet could not divine, but the theft foreshadowed no good, and it complicated the quandary.

At any cost he must get away from this enchanted forest.

"Never mind," he mused, "I was determined to wade through the swamp, and now or never must I

try it. I shall get on the faster as I shall have no horse to drag after. And we shall see what follows."

With this devil-may-care saying, which suited his youth, he set out. The night was clear enough for him to see his way. He consulted the Pole star, and walked toward the west as rapidly as the ground permitted; at every instant he had to go around pools, and leap ditches at the risk of breaking his legs. Riding boots were, however, suitable for wading. Often the earth gave way, and he had to probe for more solid footing with his sheathed sword, but he was light and nimble, and pulled himself through every pit. At the end of twenty minutes, spent in gymnastic feats which were downright prodigies, he stopped to take breath and look back for the first time.

The pine wood was a good way to the rear and loomed up black on the horizon.

His excellent sight also discerned another black mass nearer and less inoffensive. About two hundred paces off, on the road, or rather no-road which he had straggled over, was sharply outlined the shape of a mounted man. It was enough to stupify the beholder. Whence came this strange cavalier who walked without sound and now stopped like a statue? It could be believed that he had emerged from a pond, and the officer might be pardoned if he thought it a water-sprite haunting the morass. But the great events through which he went had blotted out the tales of his mother, and he feared creatures of his kind who could deliver sword strokes as

little as gnomes and elves. He suspected that he was confronted by a being of flesh and blood, and not a friendly one.

Furthermore, he vulgarized him into a horse-thief, mounted on the charger he had lost. But still he did not understand what he was about. An enemy would have run at him without hesitation; a horse-stealer would have ridden away. This mysterious rider was content to follow him slowly. To verify this supposition, Albert strode on some twenty paces and then stopped. The stranger kept his distance and seemed to wait for him to go on once more. The case became embarrassing.

Was he to proceed without troubling himself about this singular pursuit, or should he retrace his steps and summon the prying horseman to unfold himself? The cornet decided on this latter step; but he had hardly gone a few strides toward the man before his persecutor wheeled and made off like a pirate ship running from a man-of-war. This became rather comic, and encouraging in a manner. The rider beat a retreat for good reasons, and the Frenchman, sure that he did not like close quarters, resolved to distress himself no more about him, though he was sore about the stolen steed. So he trudged sturdily toward the west, through puddle and mire, but not without frequently glancing behind. The stranger followed him with the persistency of a silent shadow.

"We shall see who will get tired of this joke first," muttered the youth between his grating teeth.

After an hour of this march of the inseparable two, Albert noticed that the ground changed in nature. The pools ceased to flash the stars and the soil met the tread firmly. A few scanty trees rose on the right and left.

The wet tract finished here, and the turf gave place to furrows of the fall plowing. It was time to get a start and shake off the stubborn horseman.

The cornet took his sword under his arm as, dragging, it would have interfered with his walking, and ran over the field. He had not covered a hundred paces before he heard the horse galloping. The stranger had also struck the solid ground, and decided to run the chances of a meeting from being encouraged by the safer footing.

Boissier was glad enough to put an end to the suspense, although he was badly placed for the fight. A footman has much to do to defend himself with the bayonet against a mounted one; while the dismounted dragoon had only his sword, for his fire-arms had remained in the holsters. While running he unsheathed it, but he also tried to think of some means of more effectually checking the rider who was coming up at full speed. Chance wonderfully stood him as a friend. The field he was crossing was separated from a neighboring one by a deep ditch. A man on foot could see it sooner than a rider going at speed.

Albert formed his plan and put it into execution with much skill and accuracy. At the moment when the mysterious cavalier reached him, he leaped to

one side and let the horseman follow the impulsion of his furious gallop, just as the Spanish bull-fighters dodge the bull in wild career. From every point of view what he did was the very thing. In the first place a bullet whirled by his ear without touching him, and almost at the same moment he had the satisfaction to see the man and the horse fall into the ditch. In less than a second, the cornet charged them with his swinging saber. The man uttered the most lamentable shrieks, which did not soften the dragoon, but the horse kicked out so desperately that he could not well get near it. Still he moved so as to find a chance in which to deliver a straight thrust which would have nailed the rider to the saddle, without the risk of being marked in the face with a horseshoe, when a supplicatory voice sued for quarter in French.

The influence of the maternal tongue never dies; and hardened desperadoes have spared the fallen in the heat of battle because they appealed to them in their mother-speech.

Albert was not yet proof against so natural a scruple. So he withheld his thrust, and fell on guard, in case the invocation was only a trick. But the stranger did not appear inclined to open hostilities.

One leg was caught under the horse, floundering against the bank, and he made efforts to extricate himself, most laughable because they were clumsy and unintelligent, like a frightened boy, waving his arms in the water when he ought to use them to

swim. He finally succeeded in getting free from his steed, and scrambled upon the bank three paces from where his horse was trying to climb up. This time, Albert deemed it prudent not to let him rise.

He grasped him tightly by the collar with his left hand, dragged him up but turned him round with a kick, and as he faced him, pointed the sword at his breast, saying:

“Stir, and you are a dead man!”

At the same time, he scanned as well as the obscurity allowed this dubious antagonist's face, but it was as black as a negro's. He was moving from one surprise to another, and the mysterious cavalier had to call him by name to make him understand at last with whom he was dealing.

“Albert Boissier, is this you? Oh, had I only known!” croaked a hoarse, cracked high voice, which probably had not its like in the whole French army.

“Panardel?” ejaculated the other, bursting with laughter. “Where the deuce do you come from, you unlucky dog.”

“Out of the slough,” gurgled the bog-soaked Agenor.

CHAPTER VII.

THE REPORT.

This frank reply only doubled the laughter as the dragoon now perceived the cause of his brother officer's change of complexion. From his immersion in a black pool, the poor fellow had brought a mask of mud. He laughed so heartily that he was obliged to sit down on the bank to have it out.

"Do you see anything funny in it?" queried Panardel, sourly.

"Very much, and you ought to allow that I am justified. But—the Lord forgive you! that is my horse you brought here to drown." He had recognized the bay, its brightness dulled by the bath of muddy water.

"I did not know whose it was," mumbled Agenor.

"Come, come, my dear fellow," went on Albert, becoming suddenly serious, "make this more clear to me; tell me why you stole—I use the fit word—stole a horse sent me by the Emperor, and why you tried to kill me with my own pistols?"

"You may have seen that my own horse threw me into the swamp," began Panardel.

"Ah, it was you who was carried off the road? I had forgotten that," said Albert, contrite at having abandoned a comrade in distress.

"I had hard work to pull myself out of it,"

whined the French hussar, "and the confounded horse stuck in it. I looked around for you, but I did not see any living creature but that horse, tied to a tree, and I—I wanted a horse so bad that I took it."

"Without troubling yourself about the owner's fate, on foot among the enemy."

"I thought the hussars had gobbled you long before."

"But all this is no reason for your hunting me over the bog without telling who you were, and charging me on the level."

"I wish you had been in my place," dolefully remarked the other. "I did not want to take another dip, and the man I saw seemed to know the best way, so I followed you, though I thought you were an enemy."

"I am so much obliged!"

"But any lantern serves, and I expected by following you I should keep out of the sloughs."

"You are more witty than I gave you credit for being. But why the pistol shot?"

"Because I was afraid of you!"

"I see. You believe in the saying that 'It is better to kill the devil than have the devil kill you.'"

Agenor trembled and blushed under his mask of mud. But the other, already oblivious of his grievances against the luckless fop, was reflecting how to accomplish his errand without leaving him to his fate. It was not easy to solve the problem with only one horse between the two.

"Hark!" exclaimed Agenor suddenly, extending his arm toward the Soulaines road.

Listening, they heard the dull rumble of distant galloping. Indistinct at first, it swiftly approached. Beyond a doubt, a mounted body was coming up the road.

"That's the hussars!" whispered Panardel.

"Coming back for us," observed Boissier, more tranquilly.

"Do you expect us to wait for them?" gasped the other, rushing to the horse, standing peacefully by the ditch.

He had a foot in the stirrup, when his comrade held him down, saying coldly:

"You forget that this is my horse."

Poor Agenor did not feel strong enough to quarrel over it, and he yielded, but not without dolefully moaning:

"Are you going to let both of us be caught?"

"Why, do you not see that the surest way to bring them upon us is to mount," impatiently protested the younger officer; "we are far from the highway, but they can see in the clear night."

"My gracious, what shall we do?"

"Come down off the bank," returned Albert, drawing the horse by the bridle down into the hollow beside the ditch. "And now, lie down, you," he added, setting him the example.

Thus lowered beneath the line of sight the trio became invisible. The squad was coming up fast. The scabbards were heard clinking on the stirrups;

but the horse's back hardly rose above the ground level, and Albert kept his hand on the muzzle to prevent it whinnying. But they went through a moment of anguish as the horsemen passed them on the causeway. The two saw their heads and forms outlined plainly against the sky. They had slackened gait and were going at a walk, so that it was natural to suppose that they had espied something and were going to come upon the plain. But the slow march continued without interruption.

When the party had gone by, the cornet of dragoons felt lively satisfaction, but he would have given a good deal to know whether it comprised Father Lecomte in its midst as a prisoner. Through all the ups and downs of that night, he had not for a minute ceased to think of the heroic peasant who had offered up his liberty—perhaps his life, for him. Therese's memory mingled no little with the interest felt toward the farmer, and he also pondered about him in connection with his task, so very difficult without a guide.

Panardel had obeyed his brother cornet without demur and now he congratulated himself on having done so. Though his senior, he had conceived a high opinion of him after the relief from the ditch, the kick apart—and he was inclined to accord him boundless confidence. He was not far wrong in relying on Boissier's coolness and brains, for the latter's military training seemed to be inborn, or otherwise they could hardly have developed so widely since he came into the field.

So long as he had dwelt in Captain Champoreau's leading strings, he had limited himself to executing his orders, in which he certainly had done well; but peril and isolation had unfolded gifts which he had no idea were in him. Necessity makes many a warrior, and he defended his life like an old trooper.

The hostile scouts had gone afar, but the situation had not become much more encouraging. Night was stealing on so that they ought to move briskly, for there was much to do before dawn, if the young commander wanted to carry out the mission of the Emperor. He had made up his mind that he would not return to headquarters without news worth reporting.

The course of the Aube, the names of villages, the return by way of Brienne, all these stratagetic points had not been knocked out of his head, and he knew a little better than at the outset how to observe the enemy.

Therefore he trusted to fulfill his errand properly, and pictured himself arriving alone at the staff-quarters and receiving a word of praise from the imperial lips. He, a cornet! This hope would have driven him through corps upon corps of the allied hosts.

But they had to be found, and that might not be easy.

Panardel's unexpected return sadly tangled the maze, instead of aiding to clear it up.

The young dragoon was too generous to dream

of shaking him off; but he had a luminous idea: he brought the horse up out of the hollow, attentively examined it to see what was its condition, and being assured about its length of body and strength of back, he leaped lightly into the saddle.

"Are you going to leave me here?" whined Agenor.

"I have the right to do so, if only to teach you not to steal your superior officer's horse," responded Albert, unable to deny himself the pleasure of frightening the young man in joke.

"I swear that I believed you dead," whimpered the dandy, whose senses were upset by his alarm.

"Really? what if I prove to you that I am very much alive by spurring off and leaving you where you stand?"

"Oh, Boissier! you would not do that; you would not abandon your brother-officer, your fellow-countryman! and the Emperor sent me off with you on this scout, and you are obliged to bring back all you can of your company with you."

"Do you think that?" said Albert, gravely, hiding with difficulty his strong inclination to laugh.

"Certainly," returned the hussar, delighted at having hit upon a powerful argument; "the Emperor will haul you over the coals for dropping me."

"I do not know it is so," replied the dragoon, not caring to carry the joke any farther. "But, my dear comrade, I have no intention of losing your valuable company, for I reckon on taking you with me."

"But how?" inquired Agenor. "I cannot stand,

and I could never keep pace with the horse, though I held on by his tail."

"How? Oh, you shall ride on the crupper," responded Albert.

The offer much surprised the dashing hussar, who never expected so much generosity, and he began to pour out thanks. But while one's first impulse is always the best, Agenor had scarcely justified the proverb before he cooled and began to raise objections. In fact, the rear man in riding double would catch the most shots if there were a chase. He urged that he could not ride without stirrups, that his back was almost broken, and that he would certainly fall. He pleaded so energetically that the other saw at what he was aiming.

"My dear and valiant fellow-officer," said he, with a tone which would have rejoiced the spirit of his father, "you want to change places and bring me in with yourself riding first. I grant your preference, but I want you to observe that the horse is mine, and that it is no fault of mine if you drowned yours in a mud puddle, and I do not know any article of war by which the inferior in rank rides in front of his superior. Just decide what you will do straight-way, as I am not going to wait a full minute."

This sharp, dry address made such an impression on the wholesale grocer's son that he hastened to climb upon the animal's back. He did not succeed without his comrade's help, or without grotesque contortions, and he was finally installed without any pretense of elegance. At the very instant Albert

drove in the spurs, and the vigorous bay, in spite of the increased burden, went off into a long trot, which might carry them along some twelve miles an hour.

The horsemen had not a very martial aspect, and the merest boy with a good musket might have brought the night's adventures to a humiliating close, but Albert relied on the night, darkness and the good fortune which had attended him so far.

Little inclined for conversation he let Panardel moan and grumble at his ease, without once addressing him a word.

On leaving the fields he found woodland enough to give him cover while keeping his line, and steadily bore to the west. The country grew more and more deserted. Few were the farms, and he did not even come across such shanties as that in which the unfortunate Hermann had breathed his last. Not a man appeared of whom he could ask information, and not a sound announced that he was near a military post. Thus for three hours they rode, when the youthful commander began to fear that he had gone astray. The ground suddenly lowered steeply, and almost instantly, as they burst through a screen of trees; Albert uttered a cry of surprise.

Under his feet a deep valley opened, and the innumerable watchfires of the allied armies scintillated like stars on a winter's night. This time it was no detachment bivouacking or even a division; for the fires extended far down the valley, and especially on the right. In places they were reflected by river

water, and they lighted up houses and a church steeple.

Albert had marched so happily that he had come out upon the Aube.

He had studied the maps, and by combining with memory of them what he had gathered from Lecomte, he concluded that chance had led him straight upon the village of Larothiere, the principal point he had to investigate.

He thrilled with gladness, and almost with pride on perceiving that his coolness and particularly his perseverance had overcome all obstacles.

The Youngest Soldier of the Grande Armée, an officer by imperial favor, had done what old soldiers might have failed in—he alone had discovered the spot where the opposing army camped. To do the boy justice, he acknowledged that chance played a great part in his success, and that the captain and the escort had contributed mainly to the result by keeping off the cavalry, though they were killed or taken prisoner. He much regretted parting from Champoreau, his brave professor of the art of war, and for the pleasure of seeing him again he would willingly have shared the glory. He had also great need of his advice, as the hardest part of the mission was at hand.

He dismounted to study the scene and to meditate. Panardel did not wait to be told to do the same, for he wanted to stretch his legs, which he did with visible satisfaction.

“Eighteen miles without stirrups,” he groaned,

as he chafed his tired limbs to restore the circulation.

"Would you rather have come afoot?" asked Albert, unable to resist the temptation to jest at his friend.

"Dear me, no!" quickly replied he, trembling at the idea of being left to his own devices; "but I haven't had a scrap to eat since yesterday, and I am just collapsing with hunger."

"I have some brandy at your service," remarked Boissier, who suffered as much as the hussar, but was not going to show that before him.

Panardel swallowed, not without a wry face, a large gulp of some eau-de-vie bought at Vitry, and certainly not brought from Cognac, whatever the label asserted. He became a trifle less doleful when he had been warmed by the home-made spirit.

"My father has some that is worth more *per* pint than that by the hogshead," he sneered, "but never mind, I do feel better."

"I am glad to hear that you have your courage again—even *Dutch*," he said to himself, "for we are not at the end of our work."

"Hang it all! I hope you are not going to drop down on all those bayonets to have them come running at our heels as before?" said the hussar with uneasiness.

"No. But I must go along the ridge to see how far their camp fires extend."

"Can't you make a rough guess? Nobody will come here to verify. We shall get lost, I am sure."

"How can we? Brienne is just over there," re-

plied the younger officer confidently, as he pointed to the right, "and our army will be there to-morrow."

"But we shall fall into some ambush, or on the outposts."

"We must fall out, then," responded the youth tranquilly, as he took the good horse by the bridle and led it toward the north.

"More marching," grumbled Panardel, as he locked step.

The rolling and wooded land was formed by the hills of the riverside. Keeping on this right bank, they had a chance of reaching Brienne without being perceived by the watchers in the valley. This was Boissier's plan, and he went on with it without listening to his companion's complaints. He deemed it useless to mount the horse, which would give it a rest, and he could see more by not going too hastily as he kept the plain in view where the fires shone. For two hours they walked without seeing the last of the watch-fires. It was evident that Blucher's corps was camping here.

Night was getting on, and though dawn had not glinted, the sky in the east was lightening with "the false dawn."

Boissier was calculating how far he was from Brienne when the shrill sound of the bugles waking the soldiers with the morning reveille began to rise. The drums joined in to make the bass undertone of the early concert.

It was a momentous time for the watcher. On the direction which these troops took depended per-

haps the success of the defending army, and once he knew this, he ought to ride at full speed to warn the commander-in-chief at headquarters.

After all he saw and learnt on the way, he thought that the Germans would march upon Brienne and consequently expected to see them file from the valley to the north. At the end of thirty minutes he believed the contrary was happening. The stir and the noise advanced from his right to his left, in other words, from north to south.

He had stopped, to the great joy of Panardel, who was outpaced; and he ensconced himself in a clump of large beeches. From this observatory he commanded the scene and lost not a movement of the armies.

Soon he was sure that they went up the river. He began to fear that he had relied too much on his topographical knowledge. But he had to act some way.

Twilight was banishing the darkness and the evolutions had gone on so briskly that the valley was half cleared of troops. By looking about in all directions he spied, below them, in a high vale, the roofs of a hamlet and some men moving among cattle.

"Come, to horse," he said to Agenor; "I believe we are wrong, and I see some country folks yonder who may give us directions."

The military fop had languidly stretched himself on the grass, and he rose grumbling at having to take again upon the crupper his inconvenient seat.

Boissier started off at the gallop toward the houses and in a few minutes rode among the rustics, who fled on seeing him. In vain did he shout: "I am French!" for they thought he was an enemy, and nobody stopped. However, three or four, bolder than the others, turned around and stood on guard with flails and pitchforks. The dragoon hastened to alight to encourage them, and advanced with peaceful gestures, which Panardel ardently repeated. Within ten paces the farmers recognized the French uniforms and lowered their weapons. One came up to the officers and politely doffed his cotton cap as he asked what they wanted.

"We are out scouting for the Emperor," Albert hastened to reply.

"Is he near here?" exclaimed the boor.

"He slept this last night at Montier."

"Hurrah! It is good time that he came to rid us of these robbers."

"I will tell him where they are," went on the cornet, "but I require information about the country. What do you call this place?"

"Lassicourt."

"Brienne is in front, is it not?" Albert asked, as the village's name gave him no clue.

"You have long passed it, and if you want to get there ahead of the Germans, you must turn back."

"But I could not have gone so far astray."

"I beg your pardon, officer, but if you stick to this road, you will find yourself at Arcis this evening."

The cornet could not understand this. He was compelled to own that he had gone wrong, and that his strategetic and geographical knowledge had only misled him.

He felt ashamed when remembering his pride on reaching the Aube; but he recovered with the thought that he had the better reconnoitred the enemy from the error having led him too far northward. Further, he saw a means here of being the more useful to the French army.

"Have the Germans been here any length of time?" he asked the peasant.

"Yesterday evening, and they had crossed the night before. But, the first time, they went down the river and now they are going up it. I think they are out of their minds."

The young dragoon reflected, trying to see the meaning of the contradictory manœuvres; but he was not strong enough in strategy to understand it.

"The Emperor will know what they meant by their marching and counter-marching," he thought, "and now it is pressing to let him know all at once."

He had a foot in the stirrup when he felt Panardel pluck him by the skirt of his coat.

"Can we not buy some bread of these louts?" he asked, with the hungry look of a shipwrecked mariner.

"Lots at the farm, and a barrel of wine we hid from the pillagers," said the peasant with eagerness.

"I have no time to waste," said Boissier, bestriding the bay. "But I do not prevent you going there. Only be quick to decide."

"I shall remain," mumbled Panardel, with his mouth watering, and not parading any heroism.

"Very well, I shall arrive the sooner," said Albert with a shade of scorn. "Which is the road to Montier?" he demanded of the peasant.

"That is it you see yonder, officer, the one that winds around into the woods."

"Thanks!" shouted the youthful commander, as he spurred and went off at the gallop.

Though spent from weariness and dying with hunger, he was radiant with joy. He spurred with feverish ardor, and while he stiffened in the saddle, he reflected that in a few hours he should account to the Emperor how he had performed his errand. All the hardships were overcome. One could not go wrong on the road to Montier, where there was no fear of meeting the foe.

After the deeds and dangers of the night, this ride might pass for a trot for exercise, but it threatened to be long, and Albert delighted at having got rid of Panardel. The bay began to show signs of undoubted fatigue and would have hardly carried double. The cornet, who wanted to present himself to the staff as he had been sent out, resolved to spare the steed, and he went slowly as soon as he had gone through the wood pierced by the highway. Soon the jogtrot rocked him to sleep, and, though he nearly fell, he held on by the saddle hooks,

and as the horse was a trained trooper, it bore him as steadily nodding as awake.

A violent shock fully aroused him. A pair of strong arms was shaking him in the saddle, while a couple of Imperial Guides were hurling at him unpleasant taunts. Excited by this bodily attack, he awoke completely and uttered an outcry of surprise like a looker into the *camera obscura* when the sun abruptly illumines the scene. Around him, plumed hats and gilded helmets with embroidered coats, were sparkling and shining.

Only a couple of yards farther, mounted on his white horse, the Emperor was staring at him.

The unfortunate cornet would have certainly fallen off, if the two horsemen who had shaken and abused him had not sustained him.

Albert blushed and then turned pale; he choked like a school-boy caught in the act, and he felt a chill all over.

"Where are you from?" demanded Napoleon, in the metallic voice used by him when he wanted to be severe.

This blunt question was the finishing stroke for the youth, who closed his eyes.

"Will you speak, sir?" resumed the stern voice.

The effort to find power to reply cost the young officer more pain than all he had gone through since the evening.

"Sire," he stammered, "I have been reconnoitering the German army."

"You are the officer selected to accompany the

Seventh Dragoon captain who came out of Spain?" asked the Emperor in a less irritated tone.

"I am Albert Boissier, sire."

"Where is that officer, that he sends you before him?"

"Sire, he was taken prisoner by Austrian hussars."

"And his escort?"

"Taken or slain, sire, as well as our guide."

"How did you escape?"

"Your Majesty had a very good horse supplied me," answered the youth, modestly.

"Then, nothing has been seen and the scout is thrown away?" said the Emperor, frowning.

"By your leave, sire, I have seen the whole army of the enemy," exclaimed the young man, with simple pride which made his hearer smile.

"Indeed? Where is it, my sub-lieutenant?"

"One division was camped last evening in the woods by Soulaines, part Prussian, part Austrian. The main body is now marching in the Aube valley—"

"In what direction?"

"It comes from Arcis and makes for Brienne."

"You saw askew, young man; it comes from Barsur-Aube."

"Sire, I am sure that it is going up the stream," stubbornly said the youth.

"Do you know this country, then?" said the general, without being offended by the enthusiastic contradiction.

"No, sire, but I questioned some countrymen, who assured me that Blucher had crossed the day

before yesterday going toward Arcis, and come back yesterday."

Questioning no more, Napoleon seemed plunged into thought.

With profound emotion Albert regarded the meditating head, which then supported the fate of France, and his heart swelled with pride as he believed that the intelligence brought by Cornet Boissier were occupying Napoleon's brain at that moment.

"What is the enemy's force in the Aube valley?" suddenly demanded the chief.

This was not such a question as he had solved in college, but he got out of it rather adroitly.

"Sire, I went along their campfire line at walking pace of my horse for two hours and a half, and the rear-guard was camped at Lassicourt village."

"Not bad for a beardless boy—but then he is the son of a true soldier," muttered Napoleon. "Go, young man," he said aloud, "and take your place in the squadrons on my special guard. This evening we fight before Brienne; bear yourself as coolly under fire as you seem to have done through water," for his clothes were drenched with the swamp water, "and I will remember you."

"Vive l' Empereur!" shouted the youth while the two guides drew aside to leave the road clear where his horse had barred the way for Napoleon.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST BATTLE.

The brilliant staff defiled before the stupefied dragoon while he was endeavoring to understand what had occurred. It seemed that all going around him was a dream, and he was only restored to reality by hearing his name pronounced in a familiar voice. It was one of his comrades, into whose ranks he entered, where he received compliments and shakes of the hand.

"Do you know that your horse nearly ran down Napoleon?" said a joking lieutenant.

"Goodness forbid—no!" said Albert, "I was asleep and—"

"It looks as if you had had a lively night, on the contrary, youngster," said an old officer, "for Pierre Champoreau to be left on the road. It must have been hot work somewhere, for our friend has a tough hide and a heavy hand. We went through the campaign in Portugal together, and I am sorry for him."

"Pooh, it is all one whether a man lays his bones in Spain or at home," philosophically observed the surgeon.

The beginner heard this rather summary funeral oration with a pang at the heart, but he was soon distracted by a strange sound emanating apparently from the sky-line; like the rolling of thunder; it had

loud bursts separate from the continuous bass. The war-horses pricked up their ears and the officers winked at one another, laughing.

"Do you know that tune, brother?" asked the old lieutenant.

Albert had recovered his clearness of mind. He was not going to mistake it for a thunderstorm, he who had been lulled to sleep by it as heard from the field artillery of Kutusoff and Suvaroff.

"That's the 'bull dogs' growling," went on the officer pulling out his grizzled moustache into points.

"Ay, the cannon," said the youth, as unconcernedly as possible.

"And you will see them bite before many hours."

"But there cannot be fighting in the Aube Valley," said Albert, surprised to hear great guns in that direction where none but the enemy were in force.

"Oh, that's not the battle—only the Guards' horse-batteries opening the ball before Brienne. Pretty soon the grand orchestra will begin, and I wager that we shall be in the front seats."

"At last, then, I shall see a battle," thought Boissier, forgetting hunger and fatigue at the idea of participating in one of those games of military chess with live men, of which he heard so often and dreamt more; on the retreat, it was skirmishes with which he had been surfeited, often in the thick of blinding snow-whirls and cold fogs.

Every instant the rumble became more distinct, and an expert eye would have remarked in the

escort squadrons a significant bustle. Each rider prepared his horse as though the enemy were within charging reach, and the chatter ceased. The echo of the dense forests through which they passed repeated the detonations, and doubled the always solemn effect of the cannonade. Boissier listened with nervous tremor, wondering whether this was fear. It must be said that though his body quivered, his mind remained calm, for he was trying to comprehend why he had not met the French cavalry on his return road. He ventured to ask this of his neighbor, the lieutenant, who explained that the mounted troops had gone on before the foot by the by-ways.

That was all the information he could extract, and he was obliged to give up a scarcely instructive dialogue.

"Oh, if my good Captain Champoreau were here, how clearly he would explain what I ought to do. These brave men will let me be killed without knowing why."

While making this sad reflection, he promised himself to behave so that the Emperor would remember him and already he hardly doubted himself. One thing was a worry: his horse did not seem fit for a charge or to carry him through the day. He only wished he could change him for the one which he had brought from Paris and owed to his uncle's munificence, but it was at the Montier bivouac, and it was no time to go hunting up horses.

The body-guard trotted to keep up with the

Emperor, and Albert recognized the country approaching the Aube from his having gone through it in the morning. The cannonade had ceased. The only shots were isolated ones, seeming to issue from a wood on the left in front. A white canopy of smoke floated over the trees.

A good way off, on the right, Boissier believed he could recognize the hamlet where he had left Panardel.

At present the escort was riding over a small plain where the artillery wheels had deeply rutted the soil. This was the only trace of the passage of the vanguard, and this field, surrounded by hoary oaks, wore the most peaceful aspect. One could never dream that on the other side of those ancient trees, seemingly planted as the entrance rows leading up to some feudal castle, men were engaged in slaughter.

"Here we are, young man," said the lieutenant, pointing with his sword. "The ball will be danced yonder, and if you like that kind of partner, you may be waltzing with the Prussians in five minutes."

"That will suit me," answered the other sharply, for he guessed that the veterans were watching him, and he was chafing lest he looked pale.

They entered the thicket, where they were obliged to go at a walking pace. Singular crackling in the upper branches alternated with dull blows as though the trunks of the oaks were struck; a gang of wood-cutters seemed at work.

"They are still firing too high," commented a lieutenant quietly as he rode beside the cornet.

He better understood the cause of the lofty tree-chopping on seeing a huge splinter fall in front of his horse. The cannon balls were decapitating the forest kings, and this proof of the want of skill in the hostile gunners contributed to steadying the dragoon. He had no time to study much of the effects of the artillery fire on trees as the squadron came out of the woods and the whole battle-field appeared.

On a height the Emperor was placed to examine the enemy. His staff collected behind him, and the escort deployed into single line to offer less of a mark to the main gunners. Albert, closing up the extreme right squadron, could comprise the view in a glance.

Numerous cavalry covered the narrow, rolling plain at his feet. Their helmets, breastplates, and swords and spears flashed. A little farther, the castle of Brienne towered over the town, the roofs standing out from on the background of trees. The Aube flowed on the left, where long files of the dark-clothed Prussians lengthened out.

It was three o'clock, and a lustreless wintry sun lighted a landscape animated and yet mournful. The ground was damp, and dry leaves were whisked about as in the early fall.

The artillery duel had almost ceased, and a French battery, stationed on the right, had been hushed since the Emperor arrived. On the other side, only a few lone shots broke forth at long intervals to try the range. It looked as though the

armies recoiled like duelists before engaging closely.

Swarms of staff-messengers flew from the imperial group in every direction. It was a marvel to see them speeding over the slippery hillside, bending down on their horses' neck, and disappearing in the smoke blown across the level land. The cornet envied their duty as he experienced the torture of suspense, the worst to endure in front of danger.

Around him the veterans passed standard jests or showed their military lore by naming the regiments by their uniforms.

"Oh," exclaimed Albert, suddenly, while his eyes blazed with rage, "there are the Russian Cuirassiers!"

"That's so," said the old lieutenant, almost dropping the short pipe he always smoked before an engagement, at this burst of emotion: "What have they done to you?"

"And there are the Cossacks!" cried Albert in the same eager tone, as he spied a forest of lances and a rush of cavalry, helter-skelter in marked contrast to the calm reigning over the horse troops before Brienne.

"They killed his father out there," the word passed, and those not acquainted with Albert's story, watched his glowing face with sympathy.

"Does not our cavalry see them? Why don't they go at them?"

There was no time for his impatient questions to be answered by a word; more practically, they were already settled.

A thundering sound rolled from the hill foot, and a deep column of mounted troops galloped out upon the plain.

"That's Lefebvre-Desnouettes leading the Horse-guards," said a white-headed dragoon-guardsman, speaking straight at Albert: "Captain Boissier was one of his own favorites—just mark how he handles the heavy cavalry!"

The fascinated youth saw the moving body roll over the level and go clean through the Russian line as if it were an immense projectile. Short and almost silent was the cleavage. The swords had not been drawn and the only sound was the smothered one of horses knocked over and armor clashing. Then the medley disentangled like a skein parted out into separate threads. The Russians fell back in disorder, behind their infantry forming square, and a long sheet of white smoke covered its front to the foe. The musketry began, and the French cavalry, called in from following up the advantage, retired in regular order.

This charge was the signal for a general attack. On both sides a dreadful cannonade poured out.

Boissier could not see the French batteries hidden round the wood, but the town before him was wrapped in fire and smoke like a ship-of-war firing both broadsides at once. The German guns there, placed in stages from the first houses to the citadel base, fired over the Russians' heads. Above the large trees of the town park fluttered flocks of frightened ravens.

Absorbed by the sight, the cornet had already seen the earth around him heave up and crumble down two or three times, as though gigantic moles were at work, and a sinister rumble accompanied the phenomena, of which he now sought the cause.

As he was watching one of these intermittent furrows not twenty paces off, he heard a warning cry: "Look out for the ball on the bound!" and the lieutenant's husky voice added: "Stoop! deuce take you—stoop!"

Boissier mechanically obeyed, and bowed over his horse's neck. In the same second a mighty breeze fanned his ears and a dull sound followed. The ball ricochetting over his head, had gone plump into the troop. Two men were struck, one slain outright, the other left with a broken leg. A disemboweled charger struggled on the ground with desperate kicks, and blood splashed the mud.

"Ha!" tranquilly remarked the lieutenant, "you would have had that pill only for me. Luckily I know all about such boluses. Mind, youngster, you must look out when a ball comes skipping along in that style."

Albert was torn to the heart by the groans of the wounded and the screams of the horses, and he felt like running to help them.

"Zounds, sir," said an old captain's irritated voice, "did you come here to inventory the losses? Close up the line, a thousand thunders befall you."

The cornet made an effort over himself and repeated the command in an unsteady voice.

But the soldiers had not waited for the order to re-form the line, and the squadron dressed up under fire into the battle array. No one troubled about the dead, and the men went on smoking and conversing as though in a corner of the mess-room. The old troopers had seen their comrades fall with no less unconcern than one watches a couple of guests get up and go away from the dinner-table.

The projectiles continued to rain upon them all. Albert had plenty of work to restrain his horse which leaped every time a shell plowed up the ground. The cannonade seemed to double in violence, and it became almost impossible to hear in the uproar.

"Are we likely to stay long thus, without getting near the enemy?" shouted Albert, making a speaking-trumpet of his free hand.

"Until the mud regiments come up, comrade; they would have a grudge against us if we cut our capers without them."

The inquisitive youth put no more questions, but he thought that if the marching regiment were an hour later, they would only see the imperial escort utterly destroyed.

On the left, in front of the line, Napoleon, who had alighted, was conversing with two marshals, and the cornet noticed that the missiles did not change their direction because of their rank. A shell burst within twenty paces of the three, but the Emperor did not turn his head. This sight hardened the spectator, and after five minutes wrestling

between the will which persisted and the body which shrank, he was in the state to become a hero. He watched the balls play ducks-and-drakes with curiosity exempt from fear, and almost felt at ease under the iron shower. Already taught not to duck his head to bullets, the cornet now ceased to bow to cannon balls. He had even forgotten weariness and hunger, and would have thought it ridiculous to talk of a meal on the battle-field.

The hour neared for the scene to change.

Soon, cheers were heard along the whole French line.

“Hurrah for the Marie-Louises! here come the boys who sing.”

This shout spread like a flame of a train of powder, while on the border of the wood a thousand young and joyous voices replied with the famous song of the drafted men of 1814:

“She sings when not laughing,
And that’s like us all!”

The foot-soldiers came up marching at ease, covered with mud, and bending under the weight of musket and knapsack, but ardent and determined as ever. They straightened up on leaving the underwood, and ran down upon the plain to rally there. Many passed Boissier, who was astonished to see undersized and weakly men so animated. Some limped, but none sought to hang back.

They raced to see who should reach the foot of the slope the quickest and they pushed one another

to come in first. It was much like school-boys let out for a run. No doubt the enemy wanted to reserve ammunition for the impending onset, for the great guns were hushed, and the silence grew solemn.

Afar, on the level ground, the Russian infantry was seen massing up, with artillery on the flanks, and their cavalry in the rear; in another place the white-coated Austrians were packed like sheep, whom the howling of wolves had driven together.

Albert likened the movements to those in the sham battles he had witnessed on the Parisian parade grounds, and it was altogether unlike the actions along the line of the great Retreat from Moscow.

At this moment, the pale sun pierced the clouds and gilded with its slanting beams the tall trees of Brienne gardens. In the woods where the imperial squadron waited, the birds which had been scared by the cannon, were gathered, calling to one another from the tops.

Such was the quiet that the observer might have forgotten it was war, but for the stiffening remains of those near him, whom the cannon ball had mangled.

Then he tried to make out whither the infantry were speeding.

"The sports begin," said the lieutenant. "The Emperor, as the master of ceremonies, is explaining to the marshal the figures of the dance."

"It is Marshal Ney," cried out Albert, with a

gush of warm admiration for his father's old comrade in arms.

The celebrated grenadier was red in the face and his gestures were animated, while Napoleon was calm and bloodless, and spoke without feeling. The contrast was so great between the two captains that it was graven forever on the young witness' mind.

The colloquy was short.

Ney strode to his horse and, like others, disappeared on the hilly slope, taking with him a number of plumed chiefs, while the cold and grave leader directed his telescope upon Brienne.

Boissier was still under the spell of the scene when a strange and confused sound rose from the plain. It resembled a chorus, with the drums to mark the time; they beat the charge. Two French columns coiling as they moved from the foot of the rising ground. The bayonets flashed in the sunshine, and the white plumes of the generals at the head of the battalions stood out plainly on the mass of blue coats.

It was all so invigorating and attractive that old soldiers clapped their hands and shouted:

"Hurrah for the Young Guards."

Boissier wanted to cheer as well, but his voice stuck in his throat and as he quivered in the saddle, the old lieutenant said with a knowing grin:

"Don't be greedy; there will be plenty for everybody."

"All of a sudden, the citadel and the town were wrapped in a grey cloud, streaked with cannon

flashes for a front over a thousand yards wide. Towards this wall of fire ran with bended heads the infantry whom Marshal Ney led on.

On the plain, the Russo-Austrian line flashed fire and all vanished in the smoke.

The bewildered cornet was trying to reason upon what he had seen, when the squadron was stirred.

Napoleon had remounted, and an aid dashed up.

"Our turn, youngster," remarked the lieutenant.

"Where are we going?"

"Escorting the Grand Cockolorum," returned the irreverent officer, who had seen too many crowned heads in the dust of battle in his career. "Did you think we were to look on with folded arms all day long?"

Things did not pass as they do in pictures. The squadrons trotted fast down the slope after the Emperor. Before they had time to breathe after reaching the plain, Albert found himself in the midst of a third infantry column marching at the quick step to the right.

"We are following Marshal Victor's first brigade," said the well-informed lieutenant, reading Albert's astonishment. "The tall, thin man next the Emperor."

"But we are not going to Brienne," objected the novice.

"Look straight before us," said the other, smiling with pity for the new hand.

Rising in the stirrups, Albert saw at a distance on the left of the town a black mass, motionless.

"That's Blucher and his Prussians, whom we are going to separate from their friends."

"Prussians, eh?" muttered the youth, thinking of Hermann, and of Therese as waitress on the general who had wedded Wilhelmina.

"I told you that there was plenty for all of us," added the officer coldly.

It was not alarm that his hearer felt, for his long station under fire had toughened him. It was burning curiosity to know how a battle was won; and his heart throbbed with pride at his being placed so near a grand master in the art.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE CHARIOT.

Albert stared, but the scene was circumscribed by the smoke, in which the field of battle disappeared on the right. Before him was nothing but a forest of bayonets, with the dark, still Prussian lines a little beyond. The foot-soldiers marched at the quickstep in charging, and the escort squadrons had to trot to keep up. The singing was over. Songs would have gone for naught in the cannon roar, which sounded a constant bass on which the battalions' firing was barely audible.

Behind Brienne castle the sun was going down, and stray balls traced black lines on the red disc and the clear sky with a curious effect.

An ominous hail dashed into the front of the column, unlike the cannon firing grapeshot or the sharper sound of the musketry. It was a ripping noise with isolated whistles—it was canister shot, slugs, bits of iron, odds and ends, which clicked on the bayonets and made them bend over like wheat ears when a whirlwind rushes. The Prussian line was covered with flame and the weak assailants advanced through a fiery hurricane. There was a momentary wavering. The first battalions that had caught this shower, serried the ranks to recover for-

mation, while the light horse galloped up to take position on the flanks.

The wind wafted the smoke back on the Germans, so that the French column was apparent, alone on the smoky plain, like a ship in the Polar fogs, going to sail into a bank.

"Now's the time," thought Albert, determined to watch his comrade and act as he did.

All at once he saw him close up to the left with all his men, with little time given him to do the same. The change was executed so rapidly that the Emperor and his escorting troopers were out of the column before the youthful dragoon understood what was going on.

A prolonged shout rose from the ranks: "With the steel—charge!"

The foot soldiers rushed onward with the bayonets leveled, like an avalanche. The torrent poured past the cornet, who was not ten paces from the imperial staff, reduced to a few generals as the heads of corps had gone with their gold bullion epaulets to take their commands in the plain. It was no season for carpet-knights, and, in this campaign, the marshals had to risk their lives like the youngest ensign.

Napoleon watched the attack, and Albert believed that he saw on his marble visage an expression of joyous triumph. His eyes saw the victory. The conscripts cheered him as they ran into the action, and a classical memory struck the youth.

"Going unto death, they hail Cæsar!" he muttered, as he drew his saber in a burst of enthusiasm.

"Be careful!" censured the lieutenant, "and don't poke out my eye. Do you take me for a Cossack?"

This sensible reproach drove away the classical reminiscences. It was no time to cut the air with a sword, as he promptly acknowledged.

The melee was furious in front and on the right. The French had fallen upon the Germans, and hardly any firearms were used. The bayonet and the butt were wielded, and shouts of rage resounded over the isolated gunshots. At whiles, one or the other line gave way, and they who were repulsed moved on anew, or in turn gave way. Then the interlocked mass wavered. Distinctly could be heard the officers on both sides urging on their men—"Vorwärts: *En avant!*" on, on—forward!

For over ten minutes it was like the wave on the shore, ebbing and flowing.

Albert had lost his self-control; he worried his horse and fidgeted in the saddle: he wanted to charge and slash all by himself.

"Keep cool, young man; keep cool," said the lieutenant in his ear. "Look at the old man!" he added.

Statuesque on his petrified horse, Napoleon seemed a stranger to the mad combat raging almost at his side. He was peering through his spy-glass at Brienne and pointed out an object on the plain to a general whose white feathers and the red cordon were all that Boissier could distinguish.

"He's talking with Berthier," said the lieutenant, "we shall have novelty."

He was still speaking when a dull rolling sound rose higher than the confused tumult, and the combatants quaked with fresh emotion. The rearmost battalions in a twinkling receded to the escort: some soldiers ran by, yelling: "The cavalry; it's the Russians!"

The impetus of the disorderly crowd was so strong that it threatened to carry away the escort.

"Forward!" shouted the officers, galloping up to protect the Emperor.

Albert passed close by him, and saw a sparkle in the eyes kept on the foe, but there was no leisure to notice more.

Like thunder-peals on four sides burst a tremendous and savage "Hurrah!" which he knew by heart; it came from the Russian horse falling upon the body-guard after having sent the infantry flying. Albert heard the command: "To resist cavalry--form square!" shouted hurriedly by a general who galloped among the foot soldiery, and he believed he saw Napoleon and his staff disappear behind a rampart of bayonets. But before he had time to turn his head to the front, he felt crushed up, pushed and lifted with the mass by a formidable shock.

As soon as disengaged, he found himself alone with three horsemen, their long white cloaks blowing out from their shoulders, at the same time rushing at him. He bravely thrust at the first who came near enough, and though this man evaded it at the cost of a stab to his horse's head which caused it to carry him away, with a snort of pain, the second ar-

rived so close that his cut fell short; it was useless any way, for the edge glanced on a breastplate and the weapon was almost dashed out of his hand. The third, a hugh guardsman, dealt him a swashing blow with his sword upon the helm which it split without penetrating to the skull. All three passed on.

Albert was stunned, but though nearly unhorsed, he clung to the saddle-bow and holsters and succeeded in scrambling back into his seat. When he saw clearly, the charge had gone by, and all he saw on the level were half-a-dozen Cossacks who were speeding toward him on little ponies. Cold rage followed his temporary stupor at the sight of his hereditary foes.

Standing up in their stirrups, couching their long spears and yelling like the savages they were, they circled round him; but they did not risk the encounter singly.

Day was dying, and the fight going on to the left was but faintly discernible through breaks in the smoke.

It was imperative to finish with the Cossacks before their heavy cavalry came back. Albert had no chance but to master the lancers one by one, by his superior swiftness. He was, by his military classification, a heavy dragoon, but luckily he was slight and alert. He waited for an opening and darted directly at one who was nearest. The Cossack tried to race away, but the cornet overtook him, in spite of his feints, which presented no novelty to him.

With two strokes he cut the head off his lance and almost beheaded him. A second son of the Don dashed up too late to the rescue, but as the dragoon was about to pin him to the saddle by a vigorous thrust, he felt his horse give way under him. The overtasked bay, pierced by a spear, reeled and rolled over in an instant. Even in falling, as the swerve brought the spearman, entangled by the fall, within his sweep, he cut down this victim of his audacity, but he was overthrown, all the same. His left leg was caught under the animal, and he was stretched on the sands. At the instant, over his head, passed a couple of bullets. Another of the cavaliers had fired with a pistol in each hand as he rode by.

This reminded him of his weapons, and spite of the pain from the anchored limb he took out his pistols from the holsters and returned the fire. This had the good effect of inducing the enemy to keep their distance. But they seemed satisfied with carrying off their riderless horses, leaving the wounded with barbarian indifference, in order to continue their charge.

They must have thought him dying, for blood poured over his face from the cut head and he felt his shoulder sharply ache. But the instinct of self-preservation awoke in him, and he understood that without the Cossacks being taken into consideration, he was lost if he remained there. The cavalry would return and ride him down.

He called to his horse, and as it moved he made an effort and wrenched his leg free. As soon as he

was on his feet again he looked around. The sun had disappeared and night was falling. The cannonade ceased on the right, but well-sustained musketry was heard in the streets of Brienne.

The plain was clear in that direction. It was probable that Marshal Ney's troops had stormed the approaches to the town and were making their way by cutting through the houses, wall by wall.

But on the left, whither the Russian charge had driven the French column, rose a dreadful commotion. In the twilight the confused mass of the fighting men appeared like a black volcano, whence gushed fire and fumes.

Boissier wondered what had become of his comrades of the body-guard in the midst of this chance medley; nothing furnished a clue. Out of the press issued only single-foot soldiers, disarmed and running at random, with wounds. Albert called to them, without so much as making them turn their head. This indifference, to terror, surprised him to the farthest degree. He marveled how these lately fiery soldiers had been suddenly changed into hopeless fugitives, and in his innate bravery he felt simply humiliated for them thus running away.

Then he remembered the panics on the great retreat, when a battalion had fled from the mere shout of a solitary Cossack.

He thought of plunging into the strife, but he was cut across the head, had been speared in the shoulder, and was also stabbed twice in the neck. He had lost much blood and his strength was diminishing.

"In another quarter of an hour," he reasoned, "I shall not be able to stand."

He must quit the fatal field, or perish there. At this juncture he heard a rattle of wheels and horses' hoofs. A field piece was coming up at full gallop of its team, ringing on its carriage with its unmistakable metallic clank. Was this an enemy's gun? The shouts of the drivers and the officer, exciting the horses, quickly set the Frenchman at ease, as they were swearing in his own tongue, and he felt relieved. Evidently the Russians had surprised the hostile horse battery and the piece had escaped them so far.

Albert had an idea; he waited for the time when the caisson and the gun swept by him, jumped upon the "trail" of the carriage and managed to cling to it. No one, among the drivers and the gunners seated on the powder box and having their hands full to hold on, paid any attention to him; and the officer galloping at the head was too wrapt up in the hope of saving his gun to note what happened in his rear.

The Russian horse guards' trumpets were heard sounding the rally for those who had started in pursuit. But the four strong horses, spurred and whipped lustily, carried off the gun like a feather at a gait that would have left the heavy cavalry nowhere in the race.

But the vehicle had inconveniences for a wounded rider. Clinging to the trunnion-rings and sides, he had the utmost difficulty to bear the vio-

lent jerks and jolts received every instant. The wheels bounded over ditches and furrows, and were not delicate about going straight over a stump or log. Every hindrance surmounted was a fresh pang to the cornet, with their concussions to his bruised body. Still he held on, and by an odd effect of this mad locomotion, the blood stopped flowing through his wounds, called to the inflamed portions being beaten. They were not very deep, and the shaking closed them.

He hoped he would worry through now, but he wondered whither the artillerists were taking him. Apparently, the officer, in delight at saving his piece, would try to join the artillery reserve, and the ambulances of the hospital corps would not be far from their station. But this was not the moment to put questions, and the cornet merely gazed over the plain.

Night had fully closed in, and the darkness had completely altered the nature of the scene. The plain was silent, but the houses stood out in black on the ruddy glare of a wrecked building in flame from a bursted shell, and on the dark ground of other houses the musketry traced long streaks of fire.

In the streets confused shouts rolled up, now nearing, now fading away, according to the advance of retiring of the storming parties.

In the town would evidently be decided the fate of the battle.

Boissier remarked that, instead of bearing to the

right, the piece which carried him was headed direct for the town. The heroic artillery officer galloped within a hundred paces of a large building from the windows of which the Germans were firing, and reined in his horse to stand as pivoting-place for his gunners to make a half-wheel with the piece and bring it to bear on the improvised fort.

Albert thought no more about the hospital. He was on his feet before the artillerists had seized the gun to train it.

"Where does he spring from?" growled an old cannonier on facing the dismounted dragoon who had ridden unknown on the gun.

"I am wounded, but I can lend a hand." So said the youth quickly.

"Enough! lay hold of the sponge!" said the sub-officer, who did not notice the epaulet on the young man, smothered with blood and mud; "we are short-handed, and you are none too many."

The cornet had forgotten his wounds, and he felt strong enough to train the gun all by himself. In a twinkling the piece was loaded, aimed, and was sending a ball bang! into the room occupied by the Prussians. Albert had aided in the work, but not without being scolded for his clumsiness. He was busy with the gunner on the right side in running the piece forward after the recoil, when he heard a singular noise; the bronze of the cannon tinkled with a clearness like a gong tapped by a hammer.

"Lower your lintstock, Folard," commanded the captain of the gun to the man holding the match,

"don't you see you are making a point to draw the fire upon us?"

He had barely time to finish his order, for Albert saw him sink upon the carriage. Simultaneously the artillerist with the rammer fell over backwards, while the other gunner slung himself to one side. The bullets were pattering thickly so that the place was no longer tenable.

The cornet picked up a dead gunner's carbine and ran as fast as he could toward the town. He did not know what he was going to do, but he was so transported that he was attracted by danger. Ten paces from the abandoned gun he stumbled over the body of the officer slain by the same discharge as removed his men; but Boissier picked himself up promptly and ran all the more fleetly while bending his head under the whistling bullets. In a few seconds he reached the mouth of a narrow street where a troop were collecting whose uniform he recognized.

They were the soldiers of Ney's corps whom he had seen storming Brienne a couple of hours previously. Nobody heeded him, but as soon as he had glided among the mass, it closed upon him and carried him onward without caring whether or not he resisted.

The foremost houses were still held by the Prussians, who had fired on the gun, and when Boissier was swept by, some beat in the door with their musket-butts to clear them out, but the other dwellings had been evacuated. This was a lane leading one way to the country and on the other into the

main street at a right angle, where the Prussian park of artillery was defiling.

Where the two ways met a frightful turbulence arose. The roaring and yelling were louder than the gunshots. Everybody was shoving and crowding without any advance.

Jammed into a doorway the young dragoon was uselessly trying to struggle forth when one of those sudden breaks occurred in the movement of the mob, which always happens at a lull. The throng surged over to the other side against the wall and finally rolled forward. The intersecting point had become free.

Albert had now no trouble about marching on. He was carried to the marketplace, where the Prussian rear-guard was still disputing the advance.

The darkness was profound; no light but that from flashing muskets lit the way, on which one slipped every step on dead bodies.

The youth swam in a sea of frenzy; he had lost his split casque and his sword, and the artillery carbine in his grasp was used as a club, laid about him with all his strength.

All of a sudden, the flame of a volley illumined a horde of the retreating foe, and the cornet uttered a yell of surprise and anger, as he recognized on his handsome Arab, curveting in the middle of the turmoil, the Red Hussar, the abductor of Therese!

The would-be avenger bounded forward, but the flash expired, and all sank back into utter night.

CHAPTER X.

THE WOUNDED.

This eclipse of the man so strangely entangled with his life completed the exasperation of our hero. All his memories flocked upon him. The sanguinary picture of Hermann, cowardly murdered, rose before him amid the slaughter, and he also fancied he beheld Therese's sweet face as she was dragged along by brutal hands.

At this moment the terrible conflict of France with all Europe dwindled down to a duel with the Red Hussar, for our dragoon.

Therese! she might be really yonder, among the soldiers, as the calash might be one of those vehicles of all kinds pressed into service for the evacuation of Brienne, and filling the main street. But the most perfect absence of light had followed the last volley, and Albert, who had dashed blindly forward, knew not where he was. Around him he heard vociferations in foreign languages, and he was bumped and knocked about by horses and wagon wheels. He tried to stop and turn back, but the force was less resistible than that of the French column advancing. This time the avalanche was composed of ammunition wagons, carts, and artillery trains. After having all but been trampled under by the Young Guards, the cornet ran the risk of being crushed by the German army service train.

Still he did not lose heart. His recent combats and adventures filled his youthful head with more experience and hopefulness than a slap with a Russian saber could knock out. He immediately comprehended that he was too deep in the torrent to go against the current. Better to imitate a swimmer who crosses by taking an oblique course.

So he let himself drift, but keeping behind a wagon so that he should not be run over by a cannon. Every time there was a block and a jam, he slipped under the horses' bellies and edged a little to the right. He chose that direction, as it seemed likely to bring him into the town, and he dared not go too far with the Prussians.

In the open country he ran the chance of being challenged and cut down, while he might pass in the crowded street.

At the end of the convoy the shooting continued, but it was too distant to enlighten the line, and it was here every man for himself. The drivers and gunners had all their work to get along, and their officers from the height of their saddles could not see the man dodging among the cart horses. Thus he succeeded in reaching the side of the street when a bombshell dropped with its hissing fuse right amid the chaos of men and guns, horses and wheels. A vivid light shot up and irradiated the scene. A French battery had opened on the baggage train at short range. They had reached the end of the street; the cannon was planted in a field on the left. This unexpected intervention was deliverance—or

death—to the lone Frenchman. The group entangling him was the very butt of the explosion.

Three horses were shattered like glass, and another shell within a yard of him spluttered menacingly. He was moved by instinct to throw himself into the gutter running alongside the houses, when the explosive burst. Its murderous fragments sent up a hail of pieces of flesh and split spokes and wagon tops which rained down upon him.

At the same time a superhuman shout rose from the throng. The shells did more than all the efforts of the officers; the mass rushed forward carrying all before it, and the street was emptied like a reservoir when the dam breaks at one place.

Albert had the presence of mind to roll up against the walls so that no wheel would run over him, and thus he crawled on some twenty yards further where an alley forked from the street. The crowd rolled on with increasing impetuosity; the crushed wagons collapsed under the cannon balls and the sound ones rolled over them; the grapeshot rattled along the walls with a harsh scratching sound; but Albert had sprung to his feet and was running up the lane.

He was safe.

In three or four minutes he reached an iron gateway beyond which stretched a long walk between trees. Such was the calm that he believed the battle had spared this secluded park. But he soon saw that the bars were twisted and a breach had been broken in the wall. He entered and saw that a

large building at the end of the avenue was blazing at every window with lights.

"It is the College of Brienne, where Napoleon was educated," said Boissier, as the recollection abruptly struck him.

The clamor within was not that of a battle, rather of mirth and melody. He recognized the song of the "Marie-Louises." He advanced with confidence and when he was challenged in the vast gateway, answered: "Friend, Seventh Dragoons!" No one could be more startled than he to hear from an officer, who was quietly smoking his pipe in the recess, a cry of delight.

"Thunder! It is the Boissier boy!"

The smoker was Captain Champoreau.

"This seems to be the rallying place for the Seventh Dragoons!"

"How did you escape those hussars?"

"I will tell you presently. Let us shake hands first, eh?"

"Why you are wounded," went on the veteran, with acute interest.

"It is nothing—skin wounds."

"A nice man I am to shake you like that. Let me see them, you know I am a judge. Bullet or splinter of shell?"

"Sword cut through my helmet, and lances."

"Eh, the Cossack's stings—pshaw, they soon heal. But I will set them down as 'serious' when I send in my report. They have set up a hospital in the refectory, and my friend Martin will attend to you at once."

On the way he related that he had been taken prisoner, but had escaped, and in Brienne had taken command of stragglers, whom he drilled into a garrison, which held the college on the retreat of the Germans.

The place had twice been taken and cleared before the French were finally masters.

The captain's friend dressed the wounds and promised a speedy recovery, and sent him as the best remedies, a bottle of old Burgundy, discovered in the cellar, and some broth. The youth was dying of hunger and fatigue, and he became another man as soon as the body was comforted and rested.

When the captain noticed his smile come again, he resumed his story.

"My poor Ratibal received three sword cuts over the head, and is with their wounded, the Lord knows where. I expect he will pull through, as he has a hard head. I gave them a piece of my mind for that, as I did for treating a French officer like a cheating contractor, binding my hands behind me."

"Did their general allow such ignominy?" asked the cornet.

"He is a fine old general—he had me brought before him, where he sat at table, feasting, with his wife, and instead of offering me a glass of wine, he wanted me to supply information about our army. I gave him a quantity of news, you may be sure. Ah, he and his wife are well matched! Who do you think they have made her waiting-maid? The daughter of that farmer who helped us at Eclaron,

and served us as guide on that unlucky night. By the way, what has become of him?"

"I lost sight of him after the skirmish with the hussars, and my fear is that he was also taken. But you were speaking about his daughter?"

"I said they had forced her to be the general's wife's servant; it was for that purpose that the long-legged hussar stole her away from her father's."

Albert breathed again; it was clear that Champoreau, stung by his bad treatment, had not heard the whole account of his little feat of smashing the wine glass.

"And the drummer boy of the Ninth?" he quickly asked, to turn the subject; "he who so cunningly drove off with the calash?"

"I am afraid he was shot, for I did not notice him among the prisoners. But since we are accounting for the whole command, tell me something what became of the hero Paladin—I mean Panardel?"

"Heavens, you make me remember him!" exclaimed Albert; "I left him at a farm this morning. He was ready to drop with hunger and fatigue, and we had only one horse between the two of us."

"My dear boy, what stuff you do talk! When a dragoon is without a horse he must march afoot, or drag himself on his knees. He has deserted, this fine Panardel, and I will send a corporal's guard after him to have him shot."

"No, no, captain! I have not deserted, for here I am," whimpered lamentably a wounded man who

was tossing and groaning in a corner of the hall turned into a hospital ward.

There was no mistaking this lachrymose accent; it was truly Agenor the brave who was thus bewailing, perhaps the only French officer capable of expressing himself in such a strain. Boissier's stupefaction was at its height; but the captain felt another feeling than surprise.

"Oho! so you are here, my promising cornet?" he exclaimed in a wrathful voice. "Pray, what are you doing instead of joining your regiment?"

"But, captain, I am disabled—I mean wounded."

"*You* get wounded? get along with you; show me your wounds. I forewarn you that, if you have not at least a broken limb or a vital organ pierced, I will have you put out of here, to say nothing of the drumhead court that shall try you to-morrow. If you are not broken in some part, by Jupiter, I will 'break' you!"

A prolonged howl was all the response, which doubled the other's anger.

"A thousand thunders, will you stir your stumps?" shouted the dragoon, taking hold of the mattress and giving it a shake, which drew dreadful laments from the sufferer.

"Don't be so rough with him, I beseech you, captain," interposed Albert, sitting up in his couch; "one can see that he is black in the face."

Panardel was black—and blue—in the face. The truth was that he had fallen out with the peasants, who had demanded money for their food when they

found that the officer was a rich man's son; as he talked grandly and finally threatened, they fell on him with flails, forks and clubs, so that his body was sore and his pummeled face scarcely recognizable as human; the fop was spoiled. His terrified eyes rolled so oddly in the blackened sockets that the captain knew not whether to laugh at him or be pitiful. The better sentiment prevailed and, as he was good-hearted at bottom, the old dragoon growled between his clenched teeth:

"Well, it is plain that he is used up. How did you get into such a plight?"

"It was the p——p——peas——I mean, Prussians who surprised me in the hamlet, and after kicking me about, I fell into the midst of the Cossacks on the plain, where I was brought in by the ambulance men, nearly dead."

"You will have to strangle a couple of Prussians and punch the heads of a brace of Cossacks to get even," said Champoreau. "A French officer let himself be thumped and whacked—you ought to have blown out your brains rather than submit!"

"But they disarmed me," whined the sufferer.

"Captain," ventured Albert in an undertone, "remember how you were overpowered in Soulaines wood."

"The boy is right," muttered the old dragoon: "They were twenty to one, that time, and I could not keep them off. This jackanapes of the *light bobs* could not do more than a captain of the *heavies*."

"All this does not include," went on Panardel,

emboldened by winning sympathy, "that the peas—hem! Prussians took everything from me, over twenty Napoleons in my purse and a handsome watch given me by papa as a New Year's present."

"Papa will give you another," said the captain; "all you have to do now, is get well so as to give your beaters a drubbing as soon as possible."

The prospect of meeting peas—that is, Prussians and Cossacks did not rejoice Panardel, who began to moan without expressing any bellicose wishes. Boissier had sense and felt that love of country should be a master sentiment; he undertook to convert the other to this passion.

"My dear Agenor," he said lightly, "in a week you will be as happy as I myself to have some fun again, and I trust that we two will make somebody pay for thus laying us on the shelf."

"You speak at your ease, but I feel that I shall never recover from such dreadful injuries," dolefully replied the light cavalry officer.

"Did you never get a thrashing at school?" laughingly inquired Boissier.

"Why, no, I was always the biggest boy," responded the other simply.

"Well, there must be a beginning. You will get hardened in time."

"Oh, it is all very well for you to talk, for you like this kind of life. Your father was brought up to it and you wanted the Emperor to appoint you officer, while he pitchforked me into the cornetship without asking me if I wanted it."

"Great men will make blunders," muttered Champoreau.

"I wager that you will be delighted before the campaign ends," remarked Albert.

"Not I—nothing would so please me as to be promenading the Palais Royal gardens without these trappings of war on my back."

"You are wrong, they well become you, and you will be proud of them before we are through."

"Let me catch him deriding the soldier's coat," thundered the dragoon captain; "we are not engaged in strolling the city gardens, but have marches to make and fighting to do to save the country. You will mend yourself all around, Cornet Panardel, and make yourself fit for it as there will be plenty of hard knocks yet to give and take."

"Plenty of hard knocks?" exclaimed the chief surgeon who had approached; "enough so far, I think! thirty-five operations since morning, my old comrade, and all my knives blunted. But I can get them sharpened at Troyes, where we are all going. Yes, I have orders to transfer all the patients that can bear the journey."

"What luck!" ejaculated Panardel; "I can get some money there and sleep in a real, good bed."

CHAPTER XI.

THE LITTLE DRUMMER REAPPEARS

At the hour of ten in the morning of the 11th of February, the last of the Grande Armée of France crossed through Montmirail and arrayed itself in line of battle across the road at the entrance to Marchais village.

On the left beyond the dwellings, on the wooded slopes coming down to the Little Morin creek, heavy Russian columns were seen occupying the farm-houses and turning each into a fortress. On the right the level ground was free, but on the hills above masses of soldiers loomed up and visibly drew nearer. These were the Germans.

The Seventh Dragoons' captain and his favorite, the cornet, had been spared with most of their troop after a hard day, when they had charged five times, and they were ready to fight as ardently as ever. To see the polished helmets, though dented and scratched, the neighing horses, and the men chatting merrily, one would think the force had come out of the barracks for parade. Champoreau eyed his men with unconcealed gratification. He was proud of his pupil, too.

"Let me tell you, my dear boy," he said, with that clear tone which indicated the high-water mark

of his satisfaction, "you are beginning to turn out handsomely. But I notice that in charging infantry you sit up too straight. You must bend a little and keep up your hand. All the enemy should see of you should be your helmet over the charger's head. By the same token in the last charge, when we tumbled the Russians into the pond, you would have received a shot through the middle if I had not spitted that tall grenadier."

"That is so, captain, and I can only thank you."

"Why?" answered the senior officer, shrugging his shoulders, "you may have the chance to pay me back in the same coin, for I believe that they will strike the iron while it is hot to-day, too."

"Not yet, anyway, I think, for we cannot charge down this ravine, and there is nobody on that plateau."

"How about those fellows coming up over there?" inquired the captain, pointing to the black lines on the Chateau-Thierry road; "we shall get our quota, I reckon."

"But see, captain! yonder are the Russians climbing the hills to attack Marchais."

"Ricard's foot will receive them; they have barricaded themselves in all the houses, and you will see how they will hold them presently."

"That is the division our little drummer of the Ninth belonged to," observed Albert sadly.

"So it is; hang it all! I long to see that lad again, almost as much as for Ratibal."

"I cannot tell why, but I keep thinking that he will turn up yet," went on the cornet.

"Pooh! If we have to depend upon him to mark time, our soldiers run great risk of not keeping step. A boy counts one less in time of war, and they would not be tender to him."

"Still, captain," remonstrated Boissier, respectfully, "when the hussars came down on us at Soulaines wood we were six; each one thought he alone had pulled out, yet, you see, four came through."

"Four?"

"Why, yes, captain, since Farmer Lecomte joined us yesterday."

"You are right, including Panardel, who is not worth counting. But talking of Lecomte, what became of him after we dragged him out of the slough?"

"I asked after him last evening at the bivouac, and I was told that he was summoned to the staff quarters to serve as guide this day."

"Then he must be yonder with the body-guard. As soon as we get through our work, and if we are able to tackle our rations, I will send for him to crack a joke and a bottle with us. I like that rural swain."

Albert was going to reply that he would be happy as the messenger, for no one had more desire to see Therese's father, but the crash of musketry cut his speech in two. The Russians had come to Marchais where the Ricard's division opened fire. This first attack was repulsed, but reinforcements were hurried up for a renewal. Seeing this, the superior officer of the dragoons mounted and rode to Champoreau's squadron.

"Captain," he said curtly, "send warning to General Ricard that the Russians are advancing in force by the road. Select an officer and two men, well mounted."

"Cornet Boissier, step forward," said Champoreau. "Numbers One and Three, leave the rank," he added, after a swift glance at the horses.

At the first words Albert had gathered the reins up for starting.

"Where shall I find the general?" he asked in his simplicity.

"Not so loud—confound it! Do you want the colonel to hear you? Soldiers do not ask such questions; find the general."

"Very well, captain," was the cornet's answer.

"Probably in the main street, to the left," whispered Champoreau, who liked to scold his disciple, but also to apply balm to the wound.

Off galloped the young officer, followed at the regulation distance by his two men of the escort, and promptly he reached the outermost houses of Marchais. The soldiers seemed too joyous over their victorious repulse of the enemy to have questions put to them, so he rode on to the midst of the main street. General Ricard was under a garden wall, giving orders to his staff.

"General," said Albert, forgetting to salute, "my colonel sends me to say the Russians are coming in force."

"I know it, and am making ready to receive them," replied the commander, looking with aston-

ishment at so young an officer, and one who spoke in scarcely a military mode.

Albert was not sure that his errand justified him to stay by the general, but curiosity detained him. In a few minutes the scattered soldiers were at their posts. One regiment blocked the street in battle array, within twenty paces of the staff. The windows were filled with sharpshooters who fired over their comrades' heads.

The reinforced Russians advanced with that steadiness which made them irresistible. They had field-pieces with them which suddenly belched grape-shot and cleared the street. All the French drum corps was swept away.

In vain did the officers strive to encourage their men; their efforts were wasted on the air. The general tried to stay the backward movement, but he was carried with the retreaters to the last houses of the village, and Albert had much to do to keep his saddle.

The conscripts' ardor seemed to be spent, with all the warlike hubbub which had marked them at the outset. They paused here, however, and the officers' exhortations almost promised to induce a charge.

"If we only had trumpet or drum," sighed the general.

At this very moment a sharp rapping was heard above the uproar. It was the rattle of the French charge beaten on a drum.

"Hark, boys! that is the reinforcements coming," shouted the colonel, waving his sword.

"It is the Twenty-fifths," added the soldiers, re-
animated.

Nothing could be seen, but the sound approached; it was vigorous, but did not seem beaten out of more than one drum. It came from the right, whither all eyes turned; but the smoke drifted that way, and might cover the advance of a legion.

The enemy hesitated, gave way a little, then more. It was no place to be entrapped, with the houses still held by the French marksmen. The conscripts moved up to keep closed with them.

"There they come—our men—our side!" shouted all, as a laced blue-coat appeared in the smoke like a general leading his detachment on foot rather than wait for another horse to replace that slain under him.

Then, not waiting for the unexpected succor to be more clearly manifested—eager to show that they could have done without it, the troops of Ricard bounded onward in the charge. The village was cleared again, while, in the space between the contending parties strutted one single drummer, wearing the light infantry uniform; but the drum on which he banged had not the shape of French ones.

A deafening shout arose along the front.

"Cocagne!" screamed a hundred voices of the Ninth Regiment.

"Yes, lads, Cocagne, home again from Germany—but forward, down with the tallow-candle eaters!" cried out the shrill voice of the street-boy.

CHAPTER XII.

THE EXPLOITS OF COCAGNE.

The victorious army slept on the battle-field of Montmirail, perhaps most brilliant of all the actions in this campaign in France.

The night was clear, the stars twinkled and the sounds of war had ceased on the tableland where cannon had been thundering a few hours before. All around Marchais blazed the watch-fires of Ricard's division, dearly buying the right to repose on the conquered ground.

Here mirthful noises marred the nightly stillness. The conscripts were hailing their victory with their favorite song, which guided Boissier over the plain. With his captain's leave he was seeking for the foot soldiers. The sudden appearance of the drummer-boy had been the event of the day to the cornet. His secret instinct was verified, and the pert boy had survived.

He had but to reply to the sentinels to be allowed to enter the midst of the merry camp of the conscripts. In a barn the Ninth Foot were making sport, for a dreadful tumult resounded, mingled with laughter.

The sight within was curious. Pitch-pine torches gave it the semblance of a rustic ball-room. It was

crammed with soldiers, some standing, others sitting on agricultural implements, or empty barrels, but all holding their sides for fear laughter would burst them.

In the center of this hilarious crowd was Auguste Cocagne, the soul of a burlesque play.

His dress had gone through queer modifications: all that remained, strictly speaking, of his infantry uniform was pants, leggings and bell-topped shako. His coat was replaced by a gorgeously be-frogged jacket which might have come from an Austrian hussar, and the drum which was hung around his neck by its sling was of Prussian make.

At the time of the cornet's arrival, Cocagne was singing a Tyrolean melody, with plentiful *jodelling*, to which he apparently supplied the words, partly French and the rest incongruous German ones. As a finish, worthy of a circus clown, he abruptly placed his drum behind him and as if forgetting what he had done, sat down in it; a loud report from the ruptured sheepskin boomed like a gun saluting his comic fall, and it was drowned by a thunder of laughter.

"Bravo, Cocagne!" shouted the young soldiers.

"Lads," said an old sergeant, "I have a suggestion to make."

"Hear, hear! silence for the sergeant's suggestion."

"Well, boys, in honor of to-day's battle—whose name will be written on our glorious flag? I propose that Auguste Cocagne here present, pupil of

my lamented friend Camouffe, the drum-major killed at Leipsic, who did us good service this morning, shall be re-named by the Ninth Light Infantry. We have the Little Corporal—"all saluted the soldier's pet name for the Emperor—"let us now hail the Little Drummer of Montmirail."

"Hurrah! all hail the Little Drummer of Montmirail!"

Cocagne, who had kicked himself free from the fragments of the drum, bowed to the flattering ovation with the modest dignity of a great artiste.

"Gentlemen and fellow-soldiers," he said, "I see no way to repay you for the honorable title with which you have equipped me, but by relating the history of my stay among our neighbors, the eaters of sour-kROUT and black bread."

"Yes, let's have the story," chorused the conscripts.

Albert lent an attentive ear at this prospect of his wishes being gratified.

"Most of you know that I left the Ninth, in November, to go into hospital at Mentz. I left it to go for moulting-time to my uncle Lecomte's farm, at Eclaron in Champagne, when the Germans came along in January of this year."

"That we know, for we hunted them into St. Dizier."

"Yes, you drove them upon his farm, where they did not stay long. We killed about half-a-dozen, but they set the house afire, and they were going to shoot my uncle because he fought without being a

soldier, and me because I was one; no pleasing some folks! when we were saved by three of the Seventh Dragoons, two of them officers who were no gingerbread cakes."

"Long life to the Dragoons!" shouted several soldiers, devoid of prejudice against the horse soldiers.

"Now these Austrian hussars that took us, with some Prussian infantry to help, had a calash with them."

"A carriage—what a joker you are, Cocagne!" protested some doubters.

"Yes, comrades, a calash, such as you may see in the large towns when you go into garrison duty there."

"What would they have in the carriage—their beer and sausages?"

"Well, they used it for my cousin Therese, a fine slip of a girl, my lads, whom the brigands had taken out of her father's farmhouse."

"And you let them do it?" said the old sergeant, frowning.

"Stop a minute, sergeant," said Cocagne winking: "I did not let them have their own way entirely, for I jumped upon the box and would have driven the carriage clean out from under their noses had not the reins broken—"

"Thunderation!" grunted the old soldier, beginning to be affected.

"Yes, the lines remained in my fist and I believe the horses were German, for they carried me slap!

into the thick of a Prussian division. My escort had something to do with this—a tall hussar in a red coat who goaded the nags with his cabbage-slicer, and called out to me in French better than his manners, that I should be shot at the first stop.”

“What a beggar!” growled the sergeant.

“When the calash tore into their rearguard, he spoke to the sentinels who barred our way, in their gibberish, and the horses stopped as if they were all of one tribe.”

He paused to let his hearers laugh.

“They lugged me off by the legs, tied me up like a sausage, and stuffed me into the boot under the carriage. I had no reason to be cross, though, for it rained heavily, and I was as snug as my cousin, who was inside the coach. Thus we went on, they splashing in the mud, to the midst of a wood which I know like my pocket from having gone nutting in it.”

“The wood of Soulaines,” interjected Albert, absently.

“Right, my friend,” replied Cocagne, ‘I am delighted to meet in this cultivated assembly with one proficient in geography.’”

The word made an impression on the auditors, though they did not give much heed to the cornet.

“They had picked out a fine old camping ground, three leagues of underwood and swamps all around. When we drove up, they were feasting on provisions stolen from Soulaines.”

“Hang them—that is why our foragers there

came in empty as a big drum," interpolated a famished-looking rifleman.

"I was not sorry, for I was afraid that I would be devoured for the dessert. They pulled me out of the boot, and made Therese get out, for both of us were to be brought before their general. The tall hussar led the march, and the whole reminded me of the funeral march in Spontini's opera of 'The Vestal,' which I have performed in—when I was a supernumerary at the opera-house."

"I suppose your cousin was alarmed?" asked several young men, touched by the girl's fate.

"She frightened? Ah, my boys, you don't know Therese! She is plucky: she walked like a grenadier on parade and wore such a look that the Red Hussar durst not squint at her. Of course, she did not care a pin for the general. Just imagine a fat punchy fellow, as red as a boiled lobster, with a nose shaped like a potato, and eyes of porcelain blue. He had a pipe in his mouth as big in the head as my fist, and puffed like a chimney afire. He was as broad as the hussar was long. But then, the man in scarlet was another kind of German, an Austrian, you see. They gabbled in their own lingo, so that I cannot repeat to you what they said. But," for there was a shudder of disappointment, "I can repeat the dialogue the general and I carried on in what he called *Vrench*."

"Go it, Cocagne! give us the imitation."

"Listen, and you may believe that you were on the spot. 'You ein trummer be?' says he to me

‘You mean that I go—rub-a-dub-bub?’ ‘Ja, ein trummer-poy.’ ‘You hit it, general.’ ‘You vired mit dose boors on de droops of his Machesdy de Konig von Prussen und his prudder de Kaiser of Austria?’ ‘Please, sir—I did not know till too late; they were not labeled ‘hands off.’ ‘Dass is gut, all the zame: I haff you shot do-morrow morning, if you no dell where your Tivision is! I felt in all my pockets and said that I must have lost it on the road. ‘Ha! vell, I giffs you all t’rough de nacht to vind it, ho, ho!’ ‘I do not want so long. If it comes up, it will hear me crying out: ‘Vive la France!’”

“Good for Cocagne!” shouted the soldiers.

“Pooh, any of you would have acted as well. When my account was settled, he pitched into my cousin, between two blasts of tobacco. ‘Mark, my pretty mait, you vas dese insurchent boors among?’ ‘I was in my father’s home, when your soldiers pilaged and burnt it,’ she replied. ‘Dot’s so, und de vater of yours, he kill many soldiers of mine.’ ‘He acted quite right, and I’m sorry I had no strength to help him drive off cowards who abduct women.’ ‘You make von pig mistake, my pretty mait, und here be the broof; you are not dreaded pat in mine army; you are zimply bressed into de service of mine high-porn und well-gonsidered spouse, de laty paroness, who wants ein Vrench girl that waits.’”

“Well, of all the generals—you shall have some more French girls for your wife’s service, and I warrant they will comb her hair!” roared the sub-officer, shaking his fist.

"I said something of the sort, sergeant, but his wife came into the tent then, a creature in a yellow dress and green ribbons in her hair, with a hooky nose that I set down as a parrot. While I was struck in a heap with admiration, four men struck me on the shoulders and put me out so that I lost the rest of the fun."

The outburst of disappointment was general, for the audience were as much interested in the girl's fate as in the drummer's. The most vexed was Boissier, who thus saw all hopes vanish of learning any news of Therese. Still he resigned himself to listen to the tale of Cocagne in order to snatch the chance to question him at its close.

"They were a cruel lot," went on the boy; "just think that they made me go through the camp, where the meat was roasting."

"Poor fellow!" said some sympathetic conscripts.

"When we got to the edge of the wood, they tied me with my back to a tree. One old chap says to me, I remember: 'Do-morrow morning, bing, bang!' 'I know; going to shoot me in the morning; but you give me twelve hours to make my will. I'll leave you my blessing.' So there I was posted as a sentry, without gun or watch-box, with my own thoughts for company, saying nothing of the little old fellow who guarded me when the others went over to the place where eating and drinking was going on. He grumbled because he had none of the good things, and I took pity on him. I am going to tell you how I did the trick, in case you are left tied to a tree with

a sentry posted over you. I had a canteen which my uncle had filled with brandy in the morning. It was under my jacket and had not been smelt by the blue-coats, otherwise they would have lapped it all up.

“‘Comrade,’ I said to soothe the old boy. ‘Nix, nix, gomratt,’ he answers me, making the motion of shooting me, ‘bubby-tog of a Vrenchmans—bing, bang!’ slapping his musket-stock. ‘You cognac trinken?’ When he heard there was cognac around, he changed countenance at once. ‘Schnaps? so? giff me!’ he jabbered some more stuff which I could not make head or tail of, but the upshot was that if I had any liquor, he would like it. My trouble was to point out where my wine cellar was, as my hands were tied; but I could wag my chin, and he was sharp as a needle to take the hint—and the brandy.”

“And did you let him have it all?” inquired a simpleton.

“Rather! it was just what I had been for an hour fishing for. Oh, my friends, had you seen him sniff Father Lecomte’s eau-de vie; and gulp it; it went down like a musket-cartridge into a ten pounder gun. There was not far from a pint, but he put it out of sight in two swallows. One swallow may not make a summer, but two of his would make a drouth in the Cognac district.”

Several soldiers did not conceal their admiration for this feat of bacchanalian capacity.

“People bred in a cold country can do such things,” sententiously remarked the sergeant: “in

Russia, I saw a wounded Cossack toss off a quart of brandy stolen from the ambulance."

"Any how," continued the boy, "it put in its work on the old rogue instantly. He rubbed the spot where he had stowed it, and chuckled: 'Gut, kamerade, gut!' and winked at me as if he had found in me his brother. Next he laid his gun against the tree and sat down by it; I suppose the world began to spin round him. In five minutes he was snoring like a park of artillery thundering. It was the cue for me to take French leave—but the confounded rope prevented me. But I had remarked that the bark of the tree was very hard and rough; I began to rub the rope against it and in an hour I had my wrists free. In my pocket was my knife, and with that I sawed asunder the rope around my middle. I had only to stoop to pick up the sleeper's gun and cartridge-pouch, but I heard voices at my elbow. I had just time to slip around the other side of my tree when two men came up. It was no use my trying to listen for they talked German. Luckily my old sentry had stopped playing on his nasal organ, as the doctors call the nose—and they passed by, without turning their heads. The light from the campfires was so bright that I recognized one of them."

"Have you friends over on the other side?"

"Merely my Red Hussar, an acquaintance."

"The scamp who ran away with your uncle's daughter?"

"The very man. You will appreciate my first

impulse, which was to walk into him with the bayonet."

"And did you fly at him?" asked a raw recruit.

"Not for the want of the desire, and if I had the old soldier's musket in my grip I might have been tempted to make a fool of myself, a rash step, for I should have had the whole division about my ears in two skips."

"The boy is right," said the sergeant, authoritatively, "only a new hand burns his powder for no end."

"There was no danger of that in my case, sergeant; I have not wasted my time while having the honor of serving through three campaigns with the Ninth Light Foot. Besides, I had an idea. The young man talking with the tall hussar seemed to me a private—"

"The other's orderly, eh?"

"That's where you are all wrong, my boy, for he wore an infantry coat, and never, in any army is a foot-soldier seen to brush a cavalryman's clothes and boots."

An approbative murmur welcomed this opinion, flattering the branch of the service to which the speaker and his auditory appertained. The only person who might take offense was the dragoon, and he was careful to do nothing of the sort. Since the narrator spoke of the Red Hussar, his story, previously interesting, had assumed the importance of a revelation.

"By the way, boys," said Cocagne, really de-

lighted by the effect he produced, "if you keep on checking me, we shall never get on."

"Right he is! silence in the ranks!" unanimously shouted the audience.

"In proof of which I don't know where I was."

"You were sticking at the tall hussar who was walking lockstep with the Prussian private."

"Good! I was telling you that the latter looked more like a school-teacher than a soldier. To hear them jabber you would take them for old friends, rather a staggerer to me, for in those armies, they are apt to tie a linesman up to the triangle and give him a caning if he speaks to an officer otherwise than as to a superior, in the proper position, eyes front, thumb on the trouser seam, and elbows by the side, if not under arms. It is altogether different from our style where any common-soldier, if an uncommon man, may rise to be Marshal of France. I have not found my marshal's truncheon in my knapsack, but it may come down the chimney some day."

A burst of laughter at fancying the boy in the high military generalissimo's costume!

"I thought he was one of those civilians shipped out of the way by his rich papa, and the idea came back to me to follow them up and find out what game they were hatching. That they were up to mischief, I would lay my head. So I dodged them quietly at ten paces, forced to stick to their path as the thicket was full of dry twigs and the earth under them carpeted with dry leaves so that I should have given the alarm. And again I reckoned that the

pair were going through the forest and would be my guide."

"The drummer is no fool," muttered a conscript.

"So I jogged on quietly, having no bulk to speak of and no load to carry."

"Did you not take the old soldier's gun?"

"No, it was too noisy; I relied on my knife and the rope which I had stuck into my pocket. A bit of rope is always useful in the country. Bear that in mind, my chickens. We trudged on for a full half-an-hour, the pair stopping now and then to chatter like jays, and making me halt."

"It's a wonder you were not nipped!"

"Nip me? nip a sparrow! when I used to go 'hooking' peaches from the market gardens round Paris, I had to learn to step as noiselessly as a mole. Thus we tramped to the edge of the wood, and as soon as we struck the level land, I meant to give them the cold shake."

"Ah!" ejaculated all the conscripts, with the impassioned interest of children listening to a fairy tale.

"Do you innocents believe that here endeth the last verse?" proceeded Cocagne. "The pair were still talking away like friends, when bang! a shot went off right in the midst of us three! I was knocked over with such a shock that I thought a pine tree had fallen upon me. Down into a rut I rolled, with something right upon me. I pulled myself from under as well as I could, and feeling the bargain knocked down to me, there I found a Prus-

sian, the meek party who had been talking of private affairs with the hussar. He had a bullet in him, and the other, who must have shot him, was off like a shot himself."

"But why should he kill his own soldier?"

"My lads, I am not in a state to make my report, not having asked for particulars; in the first place, they would not have answered me and, nextly, it was no business of mine."

"A quarrel in the next-door family," observed the sergeant, unconcernedly.

"Besides," resumed Cocagne, "I have always heard that in foreign armies officers have the power of life and death over their men. So there was nothing to astonish you in the hussar officer sending his inferior to look for quarters down below."

"But you said they were prattling like twins in a cradle," said a conscript, who wanted to get at the kernel of matters.

"My budding marshal, you are too inquisitive," said the drummer. "Had you been in my fix, I reckon that you would have gone back to question the general and his goot laty."

A burst of laughter greeted the sally and silenced the interrupter.

"For my part, I flatter myself that I received too good an education to poke my nose into other folks' business. I did not know what to do with the wounded man, who would not survive more than an hour. I could not take him upon my back and leave him in the Prussian ambulance with my compliments

on the eve of my return to France! Roaming around a little I spied a shanty made of pine boughs, with a jug of water, straw and leaves and pine-knot torches. So I struck a light to examine the elaborate and costly furniture, and shook up the bed for my patient."

"What, you meant to carry the Prussian there?"

"Well, you can't call it carrying. I dragged him along somehow, tucked him up, set the water where he could get at it, because wounded men are always thirsty, and then I gave him the good-bye forever."

"You did get away?"

"From the hut, anyhow. But as I left it, I heard a well-sustained firing at the camp."

"On you, poor boy?"

"Bless you, no! It was a funnier bit of business than that, and I am going to tell you."

CHAPTER XIII.

“GENEROUS AS A PRINCE.”

Boissier had listened to the drummer's story with feverish attention, for the adventures pieced in with his own in Soulaines wood. The death scene of Hermann in the hut reappeared in all its horror, and was explained by the new details of what preceded it. The poor student, cowardly assassinated, had spoken the truth and his slayer was the Red Hussar whom chance had so strangely mingled with Albert's life since the campaign opened.

The obscurity enwrapping the somber deed was beginning to disperse since a witness of the crime had come forward, and Boissier no longer despaired of seizing and punishing the murderer some day.

Still, Cocagne had but lightly touched on the subject most interesting the cornet of horse. In this recital, Therese had scarcely more than appeared, and the details of her introduction to the Prussian general's wife did not inform Albert of her fate. Hence he waited with impatience for the resuming of the story in hopes to glean some fresh clues.

Recalling what had happened to him, the dragoon foresaw that this part of the narration brought him in.

“The enemy were firing on me,” he reasoned,

"while this boy saved himself on the other side of the woods, and if Captain Champoreau had sent me on the scout ten minutes sooner, I might have arrived at the very time to rush face to face before Hermann's murderer."

He was roused from his meditations by the soldier's shouts calling for the end of the adventures. The city boy had paused to take breath, and perhaps to excite the auditors' curiosity, for he was evidently vain on the point of enchaining them.

"Where was I this time?" he asked, as he sipped some brandy offered from the sergeant's canteen.

"You were running away after leaving the wounded enemy in the shanty."

"Right, I remember. What I wanted to know was the direction to take to join my division, for in the boot of the carriage in which I had come, I was not well placed to study the road, and I could not tell whether Brienne was on the right or left. While I was holding my nose in the air like a hound at fault, I heard a gun-shot on the other side of the wood, then two, and next a firing all along the line. By Jove, I thought, the Prussians are not amusing themselves by firing in the air but the French must be over there. Let us go where friends are."

"I always said that this boy was born a soldier," muttered the old sergeant.

"It was easier said than done," went on Cocagne. "To go back through the woods was like jumping into the throat where one had nearly been swallowed. To stop by the shanty was making sure to be caught

if the Prussians retreated that way, and then it was clear what would light on me. It seemed to me that Soulaines road was on the right hand, and thither I set off running."

Boissier's astonishment was increasing. It was more and more evident that during this eventful night Cocagne and he had all but run up against each other, and might have met a dozen times.

"After some hours blundering I reached the high road, where I felt sure I should meet our fellows, if I were right in my guess that they would be marching on Brienne. But I was so tired that my legs seemed driven up into my body, and I felt like nodding off to sleep as I tramped. It was not a bad place for a sleep. I might make a snug bed of leaves, and let the drums wake me in the morning as they came up. I could straighten up by the roadside and, fresh as a just hatched butterfly, call out: 'Present!' Whereupon I picked out my bedroom in the hotel of nature, a hollow tree, scooped out, you would think, for a sleeping recess. I laid the slats—dry branches, and spread the feathers—leaves, and pulled some boughs over me for the canopy. I had nothing to do but shut my eyes when I thought I heard steps on the road. I listened and it was plain that horsemen and foot were on the road. They came from Brienne. Russian dragoons on the patrol, I thought, for I heard another dog's tongue than German; I will let them ride by, and go on with my sleeping duty.

"Russians they were, and dragoons, for their

helmets shone. A nice quiet rest I was in for, since they reined up, as if my hollow oak tree were their mark, dismounted and tying up the horses, set to choosing a spot for the bivouac. I was out of luck! I knew they would not stay there to await the whole French army but ride off at peep of day; and so I climbed up a tree. They spied my bed by the first splinter they lit, and it puzzled them. The officer guessed somebody had been there to make it so comfortable, for he ordered a search around. They came back empty-handed, of course, as I was out of their reach; but the gathered leaves and twigs came in so handy for a fire that—by the flames of Old Nick's headquarters, they clapped a torch to them. In a trice my hollow tree was a flaring furnace in which not only was their bag of potatoes soon roasting, but I was likely to be baked as well. The smoke came up so thick that it was a question whether I should choke or sneeze: I compromised by singing like the chimney-sweeps:

“Sweep, oh! sweep, oh! up in the chimney I rush!

Sweep, oh! sweep, oh! here I come through with my brush!”

“I had not miscalculated the sensation I should make. When those superstitious brutes heard this voice from the skies, they dropped everything; some flew to their horses, others yelled to the saints, and it was a regular rout. I believe I should have been left alone in my glory, if the officer had not caught two or three by the collar. Unluckily for me, he was no fool, having perhaps been on his travels and seen chimney-sweeps popping up out of flues with

their brushes and songs. He cocked a pistol and, leveling at me, he called out in French:

“ ‘Who are you? Come down out of that, or I fire!’

“ ‘Don’t—I have all the fire I want! Give me time to put on my white kid gloves, and I will join your highness.’

“It is not the pleasantest thing going to slide down a burning tree, but I embraced this long-six and began to slide, calling out: ‘Stand from under!’

“When I landed, the Russians were gathered around the fire, staring at me as at a curiosity in a menagerie. Their commander still held his pistol, but he did not look fierce.

“ ‘Pray accept my apologies, colonel, for having dropped in so uninvitedly,’ that’s what I said. ‘It is not my fault; but your cook made such a blazing fire that it roasted me out in the garret.’ While bantering him, I watched his phiz and said to myself: ‘Ah, this is a good sort of a jolly fellow.’ He was a young gentleman with a skin as fine as my cousin Therese’s, small fair moustache, and hands as white as flour. He reckoned me up, too, and seemed a good deal more like laughing than ordering me to be shot.

“ ‘My lad,’ said he, ‘why were you perched in that tree?’

“With that I gave him my version of the affair; that I was looking for Ricard’s division and had climbed the tree, when the dragoons came up.

“ ‘How droll! You are sharp enough to be a Parisian, my lad!’

“ ‘I was born there, officer, to be at your service.’

Things were looking up when a dandy officer called me dear fellow and his friend. I was quite easy.

“‘Then you are my prisoner,’ he said. ‘I take you at your word and into my service for the whole campaign, and when we enter Paris, you shall be attached to my household. Listen! I am very rich and bored to death. I am on special duty with my troop and had a week or more to go through with none but these dull brutes.’ He was alluding to his troopers. ‘I will take you along to be my jester—my buffoon—you shall be lively in your talk and actions, and if you cheer me up, I will give you a handsome sum when the journey is over.’

“‘Ay, but if I do not enliven your lordship?’

“‘It will be an awful bore, but I must have you shot,’ he answered, yawning already, as though he had enough of it. You may imagine, boys, what a figure I cut. Doomed to make faces to amuse a Russian who was hipped—and shot if I could not make him grin. On my word, I would rather have been shut up in a cage with a Russian bear to make him laugh. I was in no humor anyhow to joke and be merry, with my country in peril, and yet I had not much choice, and the best way was to tickle this noble savage—or savage noble—have it either way.

“‘But, look here, prince,’ said I, ‘I am only too happy to exhibit my talents, with a quantity of which I have been favored by old Mother Nature and I have considerably improved them by my training; but the idea of receiving twelve bullets if I fail to please throws a damper on my performance.’

“‘I cannot help that, my boy; it is my mode of expressing disapproval. At a club, they black-ball; in my theatre, I ‘pill’ you with lead.’

“‘Just like at Madame Saqui’s, the rope-dancer’s playhouse, where I played the understudy to the supernumerary, they pelted the poor actors with apples. I am to consider your bullets as Russian apples; still, it is a wet blanket, and with the permission of your royal highness, the lord mayor, the nobility and gentry present, I will make so bold as to offer another motion.’

“‘Anything you like, if I shall like it,’ he said.

“‘Here you have it, prince. You are good enough to suggest that I shall be held as prisoner of war, subject to exchange for one of equal rank, as is the usage, and that you claim my talents for amusement for positively one week only—’

“‘Nay, ten days or two weeks, as long as my special duty lasts. Afterward, as I must join my corps, and the fighting will begin, I shall not be bored, then. Put it a fortnight, to give me good measure.’

“‘Very well, prince, let us say a fortnight—I owe you a fortnight of diversion, first-class and of unlimited delight. Every day I fail, that won’t count off my list, but I shall have to give you another day’s sport at the end of the original number.’ He thought that was droll. ‘In this way your highness will gain by the modification.’

“‘But,’ he said with his distant, lofty manner, ‘if you fail to cheer me, you would bore me; if you bore me, I am entitled to pelt you, and according to your

arrangement, I should lose the chance of your entertaining me by my having to put you down. It would save trouble all around to shoot you offhand.' The rogue had me tight, you see, but I kept cool and finally got the pull of him.

"'Prince,' I said, 'I bow to your reasoning, but I beg to have a trial performance right away. In fact, I have commenced, as I made you laugh when I slid down the tree with my coat tails burnt into jacket flaps.' The recollection of my person, enveloped in flame and smoke, set him on the roar, and off we started, the best friends in the world. He was so content, that he made his orderly produce a meat-pie and a huge flask of good brandy, and while his men regaled on their potatoes, he and I munched and guzzled like old partners. In short, we had not resumed the march before I had won my wager. Nobody brought up the ugly question of shooting the joker whose jest missed fire, and when we mounted to ride off, he swore at his troopers, like a trooper, for not handling me tenderly enough. Now, he did not carry me before his Emperor, who might have wanted me to cheer him up, considering the many slaps in the cheek that *our* Emperor has given him—for his special mission took him with an order to a Prussian corps roving on the banks of the Marne, so that he was forbidden to scuffle with our fellows. We never exchanged a shot and we had the cream of eating and drinking, for my Russ was just lined with gold and never asked the price of anything. Yesterday morning was exactly thirteen days my

engagement lasted, as I was caught in the woods on the twenty-ninth of January, and it was the tenth of February. Two days to round up this engagement as entertainer extraordinary and two more of regulation duty, and I might reckon to have my leave on the fourteenth. But the closer the date drew the more distrustful I became. Exchange of prisoners is not made as the baker comes around, every day, and my Russ might retain me under pretence that the time was not ripe and that General Ricard had not sent specially for me, to help cover him with glory. This gave me the idea to keep a bright lookout and not let a chance slip to leave them in the lurch.

“In the morning, we came up with a Prussian general who was the one my prince had the dispatches for, and we were free; but the prince wanted to look on at the battle without taking a hand in. Not for the want of a chance, for we were surrounded by troops. We were looking on for some two hours with our arms folded, when my Russian gaped and drawled: ‘Beastly slow work, this fighting, can’t you do something to pass the time?’

“‘Ever been in Berlin when the guard turns out with the drums to salute the King coming forth for a ride?’

“No, he had never seen that, and he would like to hear the German drumming. I may as well tell you that there were a number of dead Germans close to our feet and that I had spied a drum; a shell had taken off the drummer’s head but not the drum’s,

and while mauling *the drumsticks* on which the lad had walked into France, it had spared the pair I wanted. I did not wait to be asked again but jumped down off the horse I had been riding, caught up the drum and sticks and commenced my exercises—like those I had the honor to represent before your honors. My Russian laughed with all his heart, and I heard him mutter: ‘How funny—really, I can never find it in me to let him go.’

“That was enough to start me; I shouted out, ‘Mind you don’t lose him now,’ and ran away with all my strength. I saw the village of Marchais before me, say, at a quarter of a league, and I should have been overtaken only for having hit on the very best moment to shoot my bolt. Our skirmishers of the Imperial Guards saw the Russians dashing after me, and not thinking I was the object of the chase of a whole troop, they sprang forward to check this apparently important military operation. A drummer more or less could scarcely weigh with the general who commanded that charge. Anyway, French and Russians came with a crash together, and while the splinters were flying, I raced on for the village. I scrambled over a ruined wall into a garden and peeped round the gap on the other side to see what was to be seen. Here were more Russians, making it warm for our boys, who were not holding their own. I did not see the number on our shako-plates but I knew the French by the noise they kicked up. I sprang forward, whacking away at the drum. I should not have been happier if the cross of the Le-

gion of Honor were given me before the whole regiment, for it was my own comrades of the Ninth that I fell among. A good thing I popped up when I did, as all the drums were stove in and all the drummer-boys laid low, not one but me to rattle off the charge. Thunders of war! where did I find the power to beat that charge like twenty men? I had not forgotten the roll, my lads, and I believe I showed you the way into the thick of the Russians retreating—is not that so, my lads?”

Immense acclamation hailed the last words, and seizing up the speaker into a “chair” of hands, the enthusiastic young soldiers carried him in triumph round and round the barn.

CHAPTER IV

AN AMIABLE CAPTOR.

While the story-teller received his ovation with a dignity tempered with mock modesty, Albert gently glided to the door and placed himself where he must meet Cocagne when he came out. He was far from satisfied by the drummer's Odyssey, and was very impatient to question him alone. He did not have long to wait, as the Little Drummer—the title was to cling to him—had left the soldiers with the delicacy natural to heroes.

"My boys," he had said, "you have been fighting all day, and I have been talking all the evening. Let us cry quits, and all turn in to sleep."

"Good evening, comrade!" challenged Albert, extending his hand; "have you forgotten the plain of Eclaron, where you came near being shot?"

"I should think I had not forgotten the time when I should have chewed the daisies by the roots if not for three dragoons who dropped out of the clouds to snatch me from the fire. Though I live as long as my grand-dad, who topped one hundred and one, I will always remember them."

"You flatter your memory, I fear," returned Albert, "for we have not been a fortnight parted and you do not know me."

"The young officer!" exclaimed Cocagne, as his

eyes became better accustomed to the darkness. "The captain's pupil! Send me to the black hole if you must, but let me shake your hand!"

"Shake it is," responded the officer, as much under emotion as he.

There was the less outrage on the rules of grade as the scene was without witnesses. The tired soldiers were hurrying to lie in the straw which passed for their beds, and the two were by themselves.

"How lucky we all are, lieutenant!" exclaimed the boy, clapping his hands. "I don't understand it, for you will never believe what has happened to me since I became a coach driver on the Eclaron road."

"I know it all, for I have been hearing your story in the barn from end to end."

"And yet I never saw you! If I had I should have said good-by and hurried to ask how you were. Just think that when I saw your helmet just now, I took you for a Russian dragoon whom I met on my travels."

"The prince who made you amuse him?" said the cornet, laughing.

"Did you hear that story, too? But what happened to you, lieutenant, while I was making the prince merry?"

"My story is that of my regiment," said Boissier, quietly, as he wanted rather to listen than to speak. "I went into the fighting at Brienne and was wounded, but got around in time to participate in the battle which we won this day."

"How is your captain, and his orderly?" inquired Cocagne, who similarly thirsted for knowledge.

"Captain Champoreau is safe and sound; he still commands my squadron, camped yonder on the level; but poor Ratibal was captured by Austrian hussars during a scouting expedition we made by Soulaines, and heaven only knows what has become of him."

"Soulaines? You heard how I roamed about there; but I saw no other prisoners save myself and my cousin Therese."

Albert could not help a start at this name; for the principal object of his curiosity was to have tidings of the girl, though he would not confess this to himself.

"Indeed, you left your cousin Therese," he went on, with marked timidity, "in the hands of those ruffians. Do you know nothing farther?"

"Nothing at all," replied Cocagne. "You understand that the mails are not running regularly at present, and that my cousin and I have not exchanged addresses since the Prussians caught us at Eclaron."

"But it seems to me," rebuked the cornet, "that, in your place, to release a relative, I should do all I could. Her position is dreadful, and—"

"Excuse me interrupting you, lieutenant," said Cocagne with gravity, which surprised the other; "but Therese is a brave lass who does not fear death and she needs nobody to help her if they are impudent."

"She is so young and fair," went on the cornet, "and in war times, men—"

"Don't you fret, officer! you do not look at things in the true light. Therese is one of our country girls and not like fine town misses, who can not go round the corner without their mammas. She loaded our guns for us while we held the fort at home, and if those beer-swillers sauce her beyond endurance, she will strike out with the carving knife or the first thing off the dresser, like an old Diehard grenadier."

Albert glowed with the speaker's pride and confidence.

"Don't be alarmed, I say again, sir," proceeded the boy, "it is my idea that we shall see the girl again. 'Dose avvairs of de Konig von Prussia, as mine shenral would say, vas go on vrom badder to vurse' these last two days, and we may give the crew such a drubbing soon as may make them willing to yield up Therese, and that calash, and even the general, whom I should like to present, stuffed, to the museum of Eclaron. That would teach him better manners than to want the girl to drink to the defeat of her country!"

"Heaven grant it!" sighed the dragoon, sadly.

"Meanwhile, I should like to know how my uncle is faring?"

"Your uncle ought also be here. Yesterday morning, he led the army through the swamps at St. Yond."

"Why, lieutenant, if you appointed me senior

drummer, you could not have gladdened me more. Nothing would farther delight me than to take me to him and let me see his jolly old face."

"Unfortunately, I have not seen him since we crossed the river, but I heard that he was serving the Emperor as guide, and may be at present at the staff campfire."

"I will go and find him straight," said Cocagne, resolutely. "Where are headquarters?"

"Some distance, over the other side of Montmirail. My division is there, and I should like us to go together."

"Thank you, lieutenant; only too proud. Two will get on better than one, and the old fellow will be glad to see you again, I know."

Before them the plain stretched somber and silent. It was hard to thread the maze where the army slumbered on the conquered field, and after three quarters of an hour in uncertain meandering, the two new friends were lost.

"I see a light," said Cocagne, "but on the move, like a jack-o'lantern."

"An officer going the rounds."

"Or a camp-follower stripping the dead."

"In either case, we shall soon see."

Without speaking, the two proceeded toward the light, which seemed to avoid them as they spent a quarter of an hour without overtaking it.

"It is a 'Red Raven,' as the soldiers say, lieutenant, —one of those who despoil the dead. Many have fallen this day, and they have plenty of business to-night."

"That was the Cossacks' work in Russia, when my father was there," said Albert with a shudder.

"Let us go up and ask the way. These villains know all about the assignments of quarters, and they will do anything for money. If only one, and you object to pay, we will thrash the information out of him."

"Go on," said Boissier, not hiding his repugnance.

"It is a good time, for the rogue has come to a stop. He has lit on a good prize, and is too busy to heed us."

The lantern had become a fixed star, and a figure could be seen moving in the luminous circle. The ground had changed; cut up by the horses and plowed by the cannon balls, it bore traces of a stubborn fight; many times Albert had to turn aside not to step on the dead, and he remembered the days when he had been carried between a grenadier and a horseless dragoon over the snow-embedded corpses.

"The plunderer has picked out the best spot," observed Cocagne. "The Russians lie here, and they always have cash in their pockets. But hark!" A faint scream came over the mournful scene.

"The cutthroat!" exclaimed the drummer; "his man was not dead, and he is finishing him."

Albert had not waited for the information, but was running over the field.

"Draw sword," called out Cocagne, as he followed with all the speed of his shorter legs; "those scamps all carry knives."

It was good advice, and it was with his saber out that Boissier fell upon the marauder. He rose quickly and turned to meet the charge with a firm foot. The lantern showed his hideous outline. Albert felt a missile tear his thigh, but he did not stop and cut the scoundrel to the ground with one stroke. When Cocagne arrived the wretch was expiring in agony.

"By the tower of Notre Dame, how clean you do your work, lieutenant," cried the boy, delighted.

"He hit me, though," remarked the young officer, leaning on his sword.

"Let me see," said the drummer, who from the drum corps being often assigned with the non-combatants of the band, to help the hospital nurses, knew something of surgery. He used his plaid handkerchief to bind up the gash, which was but a flesh wound, bleeding more profusely than dangerously.

"What did he do it with? I heard no shot. Ah, a Spanish knife. These rovers learn to throw them neatly. But he will throw no more; and he is no loss, lieutenant, I promise you."

"But the scream we heard? It was some one whom he was robbing."

"I had forgotten. However, it is only a Russian, and it does not matter."

"Cocagne, I am ashamed of you!" said Albert sternly.

"Perhaps you ought to be, and I will look round, all the more as we have nobody to ask about the

road. The 'Raven' will croak no more and the wounded Russ will hardly be able to point out our headquarters."

Albert sat down on the grass while the boy took up the lantern to inspect the corpses lying around them.

"Now, then, who was calling? Don't speak all at once, we have plenty of time to attend to the lot. What a droll thing that I should call the roll for the Czar's soldiers. Perhaps the gentleman died while we were coming up, or the Raven had time to 'drop' him."

"Seek farther," prompted Albert, "I cannot bear to leave him unaided if he still be living."

"I will review the entire force," said Cocagne, continuing his survey. "It was a meeting of cavalry, for here are horses—nothing but horses. Stay—here is one man; an officer who—fire and fury! What a meeting! It is my Russian prince, with his head laid open."

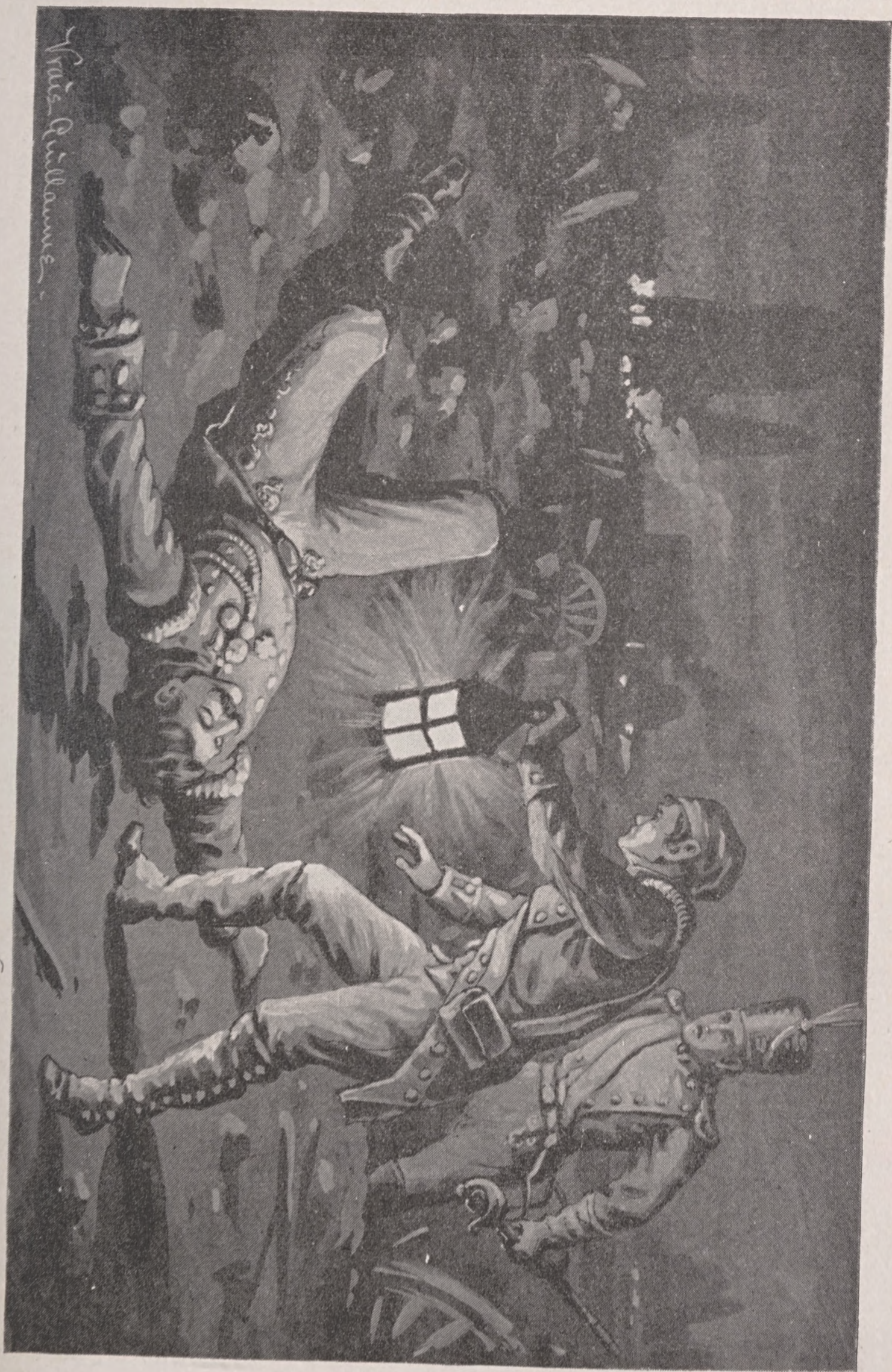
In spite of the sharp pain given him by walking, Boissier had approached.

"What prince are you talking about?" he asked.

"My own, whom I undertook to keep in good humor. He has done with laughing. Look how our Blue Devils of the Chasseurs have settled him and his blue devils."

The drummer held up the light over the pale face, furrowed by a frightful slash from the brow to the mouth. Yet the victim lived, for he quivered convulsively, and feebly moaned. He was stretched

Wm. G. Sullivan.



THE DRUMMER HELD THE LIGHT OVER THE PALE FACE.

on his back in a rut. His right wrist was still encircled by the sword-knot and thong of a long straight sword, and his helmet had rolled off beside him. He must have been cut down off his horse.

"Lift him up, Cocagne, and let us see if we can save him."

"All right, lieutenant, I know how to act. The first thing is to prop up his head."

He made use of a dead horse as the pillow to support the shoulders of him he styled "his prince."

"Look at that; he would not be more cosy in the ambulance."

As if to warrant his assertion the sufferer opened his eyes and began to breathe more freely.

"A drop of mother's-milk, and he will find it a sovereign remedy," went on the amateur nurse, putting to the pale lips a flask which he carried slung round him.

The officer drank greedily and his cheeks flushed immediately.

"Look at that, lieutenant," said the boy, "it is his own brandy, and the genuine article. Prime, I tell you. When I was engaged by him he served me up some every day, and it is but fair that I should pour him out the same ration."

"He is coming round," said Boissier, delightedly.

The wounded officer indeed slightly shook, and soon stared round confusedly.

"Don't be scared, prince, it is me," said Cocagne.

"The little Parisian—the drummer? This is fun-

ny, very funny." Exhausted by the effort, he closed his eyes and let his head fall back.

"Ha, ha!" cried Cocagne, "you thought I was exaggerating, and that there never was such a curiosity. Look at that; his head cloven, but he still sees the funny side in everything."

Boissier was deeply affected by the fate of the enemy's dragoon. He forgot the man at his feet was a foe, and pitied him with all his heart. This reckless gaiety pleased him, being after his own young heart. He longed to take part in the recovery. Spite of the pain, he knelt down and held the Russian's head, while the boy laved his face in the spirits. This universal panacea, as the drummer esteemed it, made the wound smart at all events, and the revived Russian recovered life.

"Whew, my prince!" said Cocagne, while performing his duties as nurse, "how they have spoilt your countenance. Those little light horsemen of the Imperial Guards hit hard, for their size—for it was one of them that struck you, eh?"

Boissier darted a reproachful glance at the babler and motioned him to be silent. But Cocagne's chatter seemed as agreeable to the unfortunate man as his attentions, for his pale features contracted in a smile.

"You have guessed right, Parisian!" he murmured; "it was a chasseur—not good-looking, so he vented his spite on my beauty."

"Now it is you who are witty, prince," returned the boy, enchanted to hear his patient joke.

Boissier thought it time for him to intervene.

"Do you feel better?" he inquired of the wounded man, who turned a questioning gaze upon him.

"Thank you, monsieur," replied the Russian, after a short silence. "To whom have I the honor of speaking?"

"I am Cornet Albert Boissier, of the Seventh Dragoons."

"We serve in the same branch of the service, and though we have fought on opposite sides, I shall be happy to meet you on other grounds."

This courteous phrase made the hearer think that he was dreaming, as it was such as might have been uttered in a drawing-room.

"I am Prince Boris Zodreff, and, since it seems that the French are the victors here, your guest. I only hope that I shall not die before I see the promised land—Paris!"

"Oh, I will answer for your cure, prince," said Cocagne. "In the first place the edge turned on the frontal bone and your skull is as sound as a nut. You will get clear with the scar, and you will be the healthier for the bleeding—after so much luxurious life of late."

"Thanks for the prediction, my little doctor," said the patient, laughing; "but, since you are so skillful, will you please see what is the matter with my left hand? it hurts terribly."

"Hang the villain!—the camp-follower!" exclaimed Cocagne, looking at the hurt. "He was cutting off the rings from your fingers."

"I remember I woke up in sharp pain."

"I should think so, for he has hacked you to the bone."

"Did he get the jewel?" asked the Russian with anxiety.

"The ring with the stone?"

"The turquoise, yes!"

"A splendid sparkler—no! I wish I had the like to give my sweetheart, when I get one."

"You would be welcome to it, but it is a family relic. I prize that, though it is also a memento of the campaign your emperor had in my country."

"Our Russian campaign," repeated Albert, with a strange and growing interest, while he looked at the gem on the bleeding hand with an unaccountable fascination.

"Yes, the wearer of that was a French officer, who died in the environs of Moscow, from wounds received in battle; my mother and sister, alone in our house, defended him from the maddened peasants and workpeople of the town, infuriated against the invader."

"Wait a moment," said Albert, as a memory from his childhood flashed upon him like a beacon-light to a lost mariner far at sea. "Let Cocagne turn the stone three times to the right—so—it should open and disclose a socket with a gold slide beneath the translucent stone. Is there a motto, say?"

His hand shook as he held up the lantern, but the boy had followed his directions, and a few let-

ters appeared on the secret receptacle, around which in a groove ran a few brown hairs.

"Heloise to Albert." Boissier turned paler than the dead around them.

"Prince," said he in a voice tremulous with emotion, "that ring was worn by my father, Colonel Boissier, and it was a keepsake from my mother when he went to the wars. Welcome the hand that brings it under my eyes, which barely recall it in childhood—" and bowing to hide his tears, he kissed the mutilated hand.

There was a pause while Cocagne dressed this new opening for him to display his surgical ability. A dull, regular tramp sounded from the edge of the plain; it was a troop of horses coming at a fast trot.

"Your cavalry coming to take me into Paris to grace your triumph," said the Russian tranquilly.

"Or yours to intern me in Siberia," smilingly retorted the cornet.

"I do not know which way we may go," said Cocagne, "but my opinion is we had better get away."

"Do not let me hinder you, if you think you should be going," remarked the Russian politely.

"No, no, you may rely on my not quitting you," returned Boissier in a decided tone.

"We are a little too late for eloping," added the boy, "for those newcomers have spied our light, and they are hurrying upon us."

In fact, the horses approached and the rattle of the accoutrements was plainly heard. In a few sec-

onds the squadron reached the circle of light thrown round by the lantern.

"Bad luck to them," muttered the drummer, recognizing the uniform, "they are Germans, and those hussars, too."

"Who goes there?" challenged in German in a voice rather softer than usual, like that of the southern races.

"*Offizier—mit Wunde*—wounded officers," replied Albert in a passable jargon, at least to puzzle them about his nationality until they had held a parley under the impression that it was an escort with a flag of truce.

It was difficult to understand the presence of a hostile troop on a conquered field otherwise.

"Come forward!" was the response in French.

The cornet obeyed without hesitation, and in a few steps was confronting a mounted officer whose height and appearance awakened a vague remembrance. But the night was thick and the lantern-light did not extend a great way.

"What are you doing here?" roughly questioned this man.

"What is your own business within our lines?" retorted the cornet, nettled at the lordly tone.

"You impudent fellow!" exclaimed the hussar, urging his horse forward, which movement brought him into full light, and the Frenchman barely stifled an outcry of surprise.

He had recognized the Red Hussar, the abductor of the farmer's daughter. He was here within the

sweep of his sword—the long looked-for opportunity was offered at last. But a second's reflection convinced the youth that a duel was out of the question. In the shadow loomed up the shapes of a score of men, and he did not even have his pistols.

Weaponless, Cocagne could not be of much assistance, and the friendly outposts were too distant to come to their aid. White with rage, the cornet still wavered on the point of rushing on the villain at all hazards, when the prince's drawling voice rose behind him.

"Come here, you sir!" he called out to the Austrian.

The latter rode a little farther, and as soon as he saw the wounded man eagerly dismounted.

"You here, your highness!" he exclaimed still in French, in the most deferential tone.

"It is I, and in a very bad state, as you see," rejoined the Russian.

"I was especially looking for you," returned the rider. "General the Duke of York informed me that you had been left on the battle-field, and ordered me to try my best not to leave you in the enemy's hands."

"Very kind of his highness," slightly sneered the prince, "only he remembered me rather late in the day. I should probably be no longer in this world but for this gentleman, whom I had the honor to meet."

"Who? This Frenchman?" exclaimed the hussar, indicating the French dragoon.

"This French gentleman," said the boyar, em-

phasizing his corrective title; "yes, he has just saved my life by killing a marauder who wanted to finish me, and I ask you to let him go his way."

"But, your highness, my orders run counter, and ——," faltered the hussar, embarrassed.

"Captain or lieutenant," said the Russian curtly, "I am known to you as the Czar's aid, and, moreover, a colonel, consequently your superior."

"I am aware of this, but the general formally commanded me——"

"Let the general know that I act on my own responsibility."

The Austrian bowed and said to Albert, without taking the trouble to turn his head: "You can go."

This insolence capped the climax of the cornet's ire, as he had been chafing during the dialogue.

"I take orders solely from my commanders," he said, stepping nearer the cavalier in scarlet, "and I do not care a fig for you or your permission."

The other lost color perceptibly, but he merely snapped his fingers.

"If you were not a coward you would give me satisfaction for that gesture," burst forth Boissier, exasperated; "you wear a sword and I have mine ready. We can fight this out right here by this light, with your men as seconds."

The hussar only laughed forcedly.

"These French are all crack-brained, eh, prince?" he said.

"I do not see it thus," said the Russ quietly; "it seems to me a very proper suggestion. To begin

business let me introduce the gentleman who has favored me with his name. It is Albert Boissier, and you will cross swords with a soldier and the son of a hero, which I guarantee—Captain—hem! Otto Minden, I believe?”

“Minden? It is really the assassin of Hermann,” muttered Boissier, shuddering at the recollection of the death scene in Soulaines wood.

“Come, come, sir,” continued the Russian with irony, “do you still consider the duel inadmissible? It seems to me quite chivalric—between representatives of two nations. Besides, he is but a boy—in years—and you are a feather-weight—so amusing.”

“I beg your highness’ pardon,” replied the Austrian, livid with fury; “under any other circumstances, I should be happy to give a lesson to this Frenchman; but the Emperor my master has forbidden his officers to risk their lives otherwise than on the battle-field.”

“This is not battle-field enough, eh?” said the Russ, with a shade of contempt; “I have no objections to raise to the orders cited, but you must allow me to regret that I lose so theatrical a spectacle as this duel by lanternlight—quite a novelty, and I am so greedy for novelty,” he concluded with a yawn.

“What, won’t the fellow fight?” asked the infuriated cornet.

“Lieutenant Boissier,” said the prince without giving the man in scarlet a chance to reply, “I am afraid it is useless to insist; this is a person with inflexible principles. Go and join your army, but

leave me to hope that we shall meet soon again," he added, holding out his unwounded hand which was cordially shaken.

The cavalier witnessed the farewell with a calm and bloodless face, while the hussars, who had narrowed the circle, stared stupidly.

"By the way, I suppose you are going to take along with you my little friend the Parisian bag-of-mischief? where the deuce is he?"

"I am here, my lord," meekly said Cocagne, who had remained quiet in a rut, and still stood so as to be in the shadow.

The sly dog had clearly recognized the Red Hussar, and he was not anxious to settle with him when he had so many at his back.

"If he sees my face, he will remember I was their prisoner, and my sauciness, and I shall be shot without delay."

His apprehension was not unfounded, for the hussar, who seemed endowed with detective faculties, sensed some mystery and was already hovering around the boy, with visibly hostile intentions. The drummer tried to baffle him by screwing up his features complicatedly; but this means could not last long. The irritated Austrian caught up the lantern and clapped it to his countenance.

"I'm caught—it is me," said the boy, with his tongue stuck out

"So I have you again, you rascal!" exclaimed the horseman, grasping him by the arm.

"No ugly names, or I will shave you," said

Cocagne, flourishing the Spanish knife which had wounded Boissier.

"What is it now—what is the stir?" coldly inquired the wounded boyar.

"Prince," responded the infuriated cavalier, "this is an escaped prisoner, who murdered a Prussian soldier. He must be punished as he deserves."

"Here, go lightly on the ground of murdering," retorted the boy, sarcastically; "it has yet to be decided which of us is the murderer."

"Seize and pinion him," roared Minden, forgetting that his men would not understand French.

"Stay, sir," interposed the Russian, "this is a boy, but he is a regular soldier, and he must be so treated. We will go to General the Duke of York, who alone shall settle his fate. I can bear the transport—let me have a horse. Glad to see you again, M. Boissier," he called out, turning to Albert.

"Nay, your highness," firmly said the cornet, "I am resolved on not leaving Cocagne, and to bear witness before your general against shameful calumny."

The Russian meditated for a space.

"I do not know but you are right to come with us," he said lightly. "I undertake to explain to the general that you are not to be regarded as a prisoner of war, as you were saving the life of an officer of the allies when you were apprehended. We will both plead for the little Parisian. To-morrow, you will be at liberty. And I shall be entertained this evening at any rate," said Prince Boris in a whisper.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DELIVERANCE.

On the evening of the twenty-second of February, 1814, Troyes, the capital of Champagne, presented an unaccustomed aspect; its usually quiet thoroughfares were crammed with the soldiers of the Triple Powers. The inhabitants were waiting for the lately victorious French forces to come and deliver them.

The Emperor of Russia held a court, to which recreant natives hastened to flock, after donning the royalists' white cockade. The chief of these turncoats afterward had a festival at the mansion of the Countess de Muire, the head of a leading family, whose house was radiant with lights and the doorway encumbered with brilliantly bedizened guests.

While her aristocratic guests were toasting the kindness of the Czar and the virtues of the Prussian monarch, a humble coffee-house close by sheltered a little gathering of ardent patriots. A yellow lantern swung over the doorway, inscribed with a faded sign, "Cafe de la Victoire." The decoration of the smoky interior was composed of gaudily colored prints representing the Napoleonic victories from Marengo. At the back of the common room two men were sharing a bottle of wine. They wore very different aspects, as one was over fifty years, and the other not twenty by several years. The elder's

features were concealed beneath a large flap hat and a long coat wrapped him to the heels. One arm was bent and rested on the table, while the other hand grasped a huge cudgel.

His opposite was wearing an odd attire, which was not a civilian's dress, a military uniform or a livery, but a mixture of all three. He spoke lively, with many gesticulations, while his senior listened with a dull air.

"I tell you, Father Jacques, that Therese is here," said the latter, "and we can snatch her from their claws."

"Do you tell me that you have seen her?" questioned the other in a broken voice.

"As plainly as I see you, daddy, and I know that she is caged in the big barracks where the revelry is going on this night, over yonder at the end of the street."

"How can we get to her?" said the elder, as to himself.

"That is my look-out, uncle; and if you will only let me tell my story, you will learn my idea, which is not a bad one."

"Go on," said the other sadly.

Had either Cornet Boissier or Captain Champoreau heard this snatch of conversation, they would have recognized the two and divined the subject of their talk. They were really Auguste Cocagne and Jacques Lecomte, who after many adventures were discussing the fate of Therese in the coffee-house.

"I was telling you," resumed the drummer, "that

the scoundrelly red hussar was set on having me shot and, before the Duke of York he accused me of having murdered one of his soldiers, while the fact was—but let that pass—murder will out, and this will keep for a later time. Happily my Russian prince was fond of a certain little drummer of your relatives, and he fought in my defense like a tiger. The upshot was that we were held as prisoners of war, I and the dragoon lieutenant who gave us such a lift at Eclaron.”

“I have not forgotten him,” muttered the farmer, “and I hope to repay him some day.”

“Upon that, we were sent on to Troyes, with the prince in our company, as he had his face laid open with a saber slash. He delighted to have me in leash, and he bantered with me all the time; he mended rapidly and ascribed his speedy cure to my society.”

“So you have become the varlet of one of these cursed locusts who come to eat up our country,” growled Lecomte, bitterly. “It was not enough that they should compel my daughter to wait and serve, but you must also accept the slavery without being forced to do so.”

“You do not understand, uncle. I was not treated as a footboy. Why, I would not black the boots of the Czar. I was the companion of my Russian, and most of the time free as a sparrow; in proof of which see me chatting merrily with you, while he is at the party over there. But it is not because he treats me finely that I hang round here—it is to release our Therese.”

"My daughter?" exclaimed the countryman; "how can your foreign prince help us in that?"

"Superlatively, Father Jacques, as I will make it clear. When I recognized you on the Cathedral square, I was prowling there to study the garden wall of the old Countess de Muire, who is crazy about kings and dukes and my lady This and her Highness That and the rest of the wild-beast show. That is why they sent her the *billet* to lodge the Prussian general whose wife took Therese for her maid, and they have been feasted there, with balls every night to all the bundles of fuss and feathers in the town. My prince gets his 'invite' along with the other fellows with handles to their names, and there he is, asking me to go and meet him at midnight. Now do you see how the cat will jump, uncle?"

The other shook his head in token of doubt.

"It will dawn on you presently," went on the boy. "If my plan fails this evening, it will be worked some other evening. You can lend me a hand, anyway."

"What would you like me to do?" inquired the farmer, whose eyes kindled.

"Keep watch on the spot which I will point out to you. Pay our score and let us be off, as I must have time to lay my train, and it is getting late."

Cocagne left his uncle at the Muire mansion where he entered on duty with Prince Zodreff, while Lecomte played the sentry along the side wall by the Cathedral. The night was dark, the town government supplied no lights and all the place seemed

asleep; the only sound was that of drunken soldiers singing at a distance.

The more the farmer studied the obstacles against him, the less confidence he had in his nephew's plan, which, besides, had not been wholly unfolded to him. Still he did not utterly despair, knowing how sharp and bold was his relative's wit.

Protected by the shadow of the church and the trees of the square, he was measuring the garden wall for the hundredth time, when he heard the steps of a stranger. It was no ordinary passer-by who stole along by the wall, which he himself diverged from to get behind a tree. The roamer advanced cautiously and stopped now and then. He looked about him in all directions like a man who feared to be spied. Father Lecomte set him down as a burglar or a thief. He groped at the wall, as though measuring it—an incomprehensible proceeding for our honest rustic, who could only suppose that he was seeking for a secret door.

The apparent thief might be only a lover: the servants in such establishments are numerous and the maids inclined to be flirts. But, somehow, the farmer was inclined to fancy that the woman who had an appointment with this stranger was the general's wife, in which case, as he also gathered from his nephew's story, this was the Red Hussar.

So fine a chance to get rid of a dangerous enemy was not to be wasted, and Lecomte tightened his grip on his cudgel in the most menacing manner. The injured father meant to strike hard and swift.

But yet the blow ought to be given noiselessly, and there might be difficulty in surprising so nimble a man, although the rustic was of uncommon vigor and agility.

To leave his ambush to spring upon him was to expose himself to being seen and so compromise the plan of Cocagne, who expected his assistance, as well as to give the hussar a chance to break away.

While the peasant was cogitating over the method of attacking surely, the object had recoiled from the wall and backed toward him, with his eyes upward like one studying the coping; he was far from suspecting that he was under observation. This change in position favored the first watcher's project of sudden attack; yet, to leave nothing to hazard, he waited still a while for him to draw nearer.

Ensconced by a step, behind the flying buttress of the corner pier of the church, Lecomte was unseen as he tapped on the stone with the end of his stick. The night-roamer turned, but he could see nothing. A second time the stick rapped, and the man, making up his mind to know the cause of this interruption, walked straight to the spot whence the sound proceeded. It was the step the waylayer awaited.

"Wretch," he hissed, "heaven has sent you here under the shade of its temple for my vengeance."

With his right hand he waved the club while the other caught by the throat the man whom he took for Minden.

"What do you want?" exclaimed the captured

one, but in a guarded tone, while he seized with his hands the club and the hand which he energetically stayed from continuing the pressure conducive to strangulation.

The voice was not the Austrian's; further, it was not strange, and he dragged him into the clearer space where the starlight faintly fell. The prisoner did not protest, and struggled only enough to delay the fate he was threatened with. The pale rays from on high glimmered on an epaulet, and the peasant recognized in this then distinctive French insignia an officer of his army. It went farther as a revelation.

"Why, this cannot be you, lieutenant?" he gasped.

"Lecomte!" exclaimed the other in the greatest surprise. "How fortunate that we meet, for I have been so long seeking for you."

"What a dolt I am to take you for a spy or a thief," faltered the other in the same tone.

"It little matters since the same cause unites us. I was in the parlor here when I heard your nephew, who is in attendance on a Russian prince, a friend of mine, warn your daughter to be ready to get away at midnight. So I came forth to see by what secret exit she expected to leave the house."

"Thank you, sir," said the farmer, convinced by the frank and simple explanation, and holding out his hand; "excuse the way I received you."

"I am getting used to blows so much so that I ask you to assign to me the most dangerous post in this rescue."

The other shook his head.

"Do you doubt me?" he asked quickly.

"I certainly do not—but I cannot help you when I know so little myself. My nephew and I had to part suddenly in the street round the corner as we thought a patrol was coming, and he only let me know one thing—that I should be at the end of Muire house garden at twelve. I have been hanging round for this hour."

"That is odd," said Albert. "He is too sharp not to have seen his plot clearly. He wants somebody here to help him, and her, I trust, down over this wall. That was my idea, and I was looking for a secret postern, but the wall is solid and some twenty feet high."

"That is a trifle to Auguste, who climbs like a squirrel, and always carries rope in his pocket, like a schoolboy. He will get over, I warrant you, somehow."

"I believe he may, but how about a girl?"

"Therese is no fine and tender lady, but a girl who fears no danger or fatigue."

"But, when we shall have succeeded, where are you going to harbor her? You know that all the town gates are shut after nightfall, and that there is no going forth in the daytime without written passes from the governor."

"In a couple of days our army will drive out the invaders."

"Heaven hear you! but in the meantime she must be carefully hidden, as the Prussians will set all the spies afoot."

"Let them come to retake my girl—I know how to treat them!"

"I will aid you to defend her; I want to do the same to shield you both. I have a proposition to make. I am a prisoner on parole here, and the less distrusted as one of the Czar's aids has taken a liking to me."

"The same who favors Auguste?"

"Yes, Prince Zodreff; under his protection, I am sure my lodgings will be respected; you might go there with your daughter. The prince has gone off this very night on a mission for his Emperor, but he will be back in a day, when I will get him to provide a pass for you to leave the town."

"I do not want to be under obligation to enemies."

"Pooh! the enemy of to-day may be the friend to-morrow, in these times. Russia was Napoleon's ally a while ago, and the wind may blow from the same quarter once more. Besides, it is I who do this for you, and I am one of your own. I am bound to show my gratitude to you, for I have not forgotten that you saved me from Soulaines Marshes."

"You saved my life and my nephew's at Eclaron. I am in debt to you."

"Clear it off by accepting my offer."

"Have it so. If we get Therese out, we will take refuge at your dwelling."

"Thanks, for your trust in me. To-morrow I will get that pass, and before night-time we—"

"Hark!" interrupted the farmer, as a whistle sounded in the garden.

"That's Auguste," said Lecomte, replying by whistling three times like a bird.

Instantly, at the same place, came the song of the Marie-Louises, in the drummer's unmistakable voice.

The two men went up to the wall, expecting another manifestation.

"Are you there, Father Jacques?" called out Cocagne's treble voice.

"I am here," said the peasant.

"Catch!" and a coil of rope was thrown with such skill that it grazed Albert's cheek. But he caught it and saw that it was a rope ladder.

"I told you that boy was prepared for every crisis."

"Hold it tight," continued the boy. With the ladder, the descent from the coping was feasible, though difficult for a woman. But Lecomte showed no disquiet, confident as he was of his daughter's powers.

"Let us share the work," he said rapidly to the cornet, who was going to help him; "I am strong enough to hold this down. But we may be surprised if one is not on the watch. Will you go to the corner and cough if anybody comes along. Go up to whoever comes so as to give me time to get through here."

It cost Albert some pain not to help directly in the girl's escape, but he acknowledged all the wisdom in the suggestion, and he immediately obeyed. From the post he chose, he could see what went along

on at the foot of the wall as well as in the street ending on the Cathedral Square. His heart beat high with the thought that at last he was going to do some act to prove his adhesion to the cause of the pretty girl of Eclaron, and her brave father.

He had been on the look-out some five minutes, which seemed long enough, when he heard a noise in the street. At the same stroke of time he saw a white figure appear on the wall top. The sound approached. He could not hesitate, and he coughed at the signal agreed upon. Father Lecomte's voice responded, and the white form, floating on the coping, instantly disappeared.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HERO IN SPITE OF HIMSELF.

The danger of being caught in the escape was temporarily parried, but it was urgent to learn what caused the alarm. As the cornet had charge of the outpost, the duty of scouting fell upon him, and he sallied forth to meet the untimely comer.

The street at the mouth of which he stood sentry was dark, narrow and tortuous. He could not see very far, but he might be sure that nobody could pass him unobserved. It was a gorge also easy to defend. If it were only an ordinary passenger, he could step aside into a recess and let him go on. It was as facile to leap on the enemy and take him by the collar if he appeared to have evil designs.

So he went a few steps forward to enter a nook for ambush, but the unknown disturber seemed to have melted into the shadow. Lecomte came up to learn what he had discovered and was vexed at the loss of time.

"My daughter is all ready to come down," he said. "The ladder will hold and the boy raised the gardener's wooden steps on the other side, so that all is smooth there. Here, take my stick and fell anybody who comes. When you have leveled all opposition, run back and see how we are getting on."

"I am ready," rejoined the cornet, "but what am I to do if there are several?"

"Keep them back as long as you can," said the farmer, with simplicity, "to give us time to put the girl in safety."

"I shall die, if needs must, to block the way."

Lecomte retraced his steps, and the young officer was again charged with the delicate task of covering the escalade. His position recalled that of the three Romans who kept the bridge, or Leonidas at Thermopylæ—only the three hundred were not present to help him. While listening, he looked back and was soon gladdened by seeing the girl on the wall crest. Shortly, she had descended the ladder, and he suppressed a strong temptation to run and congratulate her; but it would have been premature, with Cocagne to cross the barrier also.

His joy soon gave way to surprise as he saw Therese quit her father's side and come toward him. He left his stand and hurried to meet her.

"I hasten to thank you in the first place," said the girl, offering her hand frankly; "I know all that you have done for me, and I am deeply grateful; but time is precious. My father sends me to learn what road we take to reach the haven you promised us?"

"This is the street," he replied, pointing.

"Then I will stay here to await them; my father is coming up as soon as he helps my cousin over, which will take only a few minutes."

"You did not hurt yourself in getting over?"

inquired the cornet, who thought the girl was taking things coolly.

"Oh, it was nothing—a wooden ladder on one side, such as I often stand on to shake the apples off and gather pears; while the other was firmly held. I would have run greater risks to escape those hateful people."

"I promise you that they shall not torment you again," warmly exclaimed Albert, gripping the stick tightly.

"Auguste is at the top," said the girl, without replying to his proffer of devotion.

Indeed, the boy's slight figure appeared on the ridge, defined against the sky. Presently uncle and nephew were beside the girl, but she was gazing down the street. They all four heard a sound which could not be mistaken: it was the regular tramp of the military patrol.

"Can we not go round by another way?" inquired Lecomte anxiously.

"It is a long way, but—come—"

But, as they turned to go, a form rose as it were from the pavement; it was a man who began running to get out of their way, but jostling the farmer, was mixed up with the group.

For a moment there was indescribable confusion. The drummer caught the stranger by the legs—Lecomte recovered from the collision, and took him by the throat, while Albert tried to strike with the club. Before the farmer's grasp could tighten, the man yelled with all his power:

"Help! thieves! murder!"

The squeeze stopped a further alarm, but it was too late as the call had been heard. The regular tramp became a quick march, as the German patrol ran up. They were too numerous for a conflict and too near for escape.

"What are we to do?" inquired Albert of the peasant.

"Nothing. We are cooked!" said the other, letting go his victim, who fell in a heap, and folding his arms like one ready for the worst.

Therese stood quietly and coolly against the wall, waiting without flinching.

"Never mind, uncle—I may get you all out of this scrape, too," remarked the drummer with his undiminished confidence.

In a flash the party was surrounded and seized. Albert glided in before Therese so that she was not touched at the first onset, and he had the good sense to allow his own arrest—for resistance might have led to a shooting. The tumult caused some bedroom windows to open, for the good people of Troyes retired early since the occupation. The candles with which these householders were supplied, as they peered down, cast a flicker on the scene and the military police profited by the glean to secure the prisoners. An inquisitive neighbor who had ventured forth with a lantern, was pressed into service and the sergeant of the file used this lamp to examine his prizes.

As his inspection proceeded his surprise grew keener.

The farmer but moderately astonished him; but Cocagne's parti-colored attire, Bossier's French uniform, and particularly the girl's presence in the night riot, completely puzzled the good German. He concluded these were masqueraders turned out of some tavern. The living enigmas did not help him out, as they seemed agreed to preserve muteness. Cocagne was contented with making faces at the provost's men.

When the bewildered sergeant finished the survey of his captives, he directed his lantern on the one still stretched on the soil. He had not made a movement to run away, not even to rise, so that it might be believed he had succumbed to Lecomte's energetic embrace if he had not omitted hollow groans now and then. These complaints increased when the sub-officer approached, and he tried to elude the rays of light. But the sergeant, thinking that the clue to the mystery dwelt here, took the man by the shoulder with a robust hand and dragged him upon his feet, in spite of himself.

When the lantern was pushed under his nose, the disclosure of his countenance told the under-officer nothing, but it drew an outcry of amazement from the dragoon.

"Panardel!" for he recognized the Knight of the Rueful Visage, whom he had not seen since the Battle of Montmirail.

It was undeniably the unfortunate hussar, whose

strange chance brought anew across the path of the officer who had thought to be rid of him forever. The dashing light-horseman appeared in as pitiful a trim as his colorless countenance. His torn uniform was muddied, his epaulet half wrenched off, all testified to a desperate fight or flight, the latter the more likely hypothesis to those who, like Boissier, knew the unmilitary inclination of this involuntary warrior. Paler than usual—pea-green, in fact, he rolled enlarged eyes in terror, which finally lighted on his brother-officer.

"Boissier, my dear old Boissier," he wailed, "I implore you to save me."

"Save you from what?" replied Albert rather disdainfully, as he was revolted by such weakness.

"From these soldiers, of course, who think I am hostile, when I never did them any harm."

"I am convinced of that, but you will have to make that clear to them yourself," replied the cornet, turning his back on him.

The sergeant had looked on at this dialogue with augmented stupefaction: these persons who had been tearing each other to pieces a while ago, were now familiarly chatting together. His ideas became worse entangled and he saw no disentangling them himself, and chose the highly judicious course of referring to his superiors.

As the column marched off, Cocagne gently plucked the dragoon's sleeve.

"Lieutenant," he said in a voice so low that he would not be overheard, "will you allow me to do

the talking before what the sergeant calls the 'military goffernor?'

"But what do you intend to tell him?" asked the astonished cornet.

"I shall not have time to unfold my programme, for the *place*, whither they take us, is quite near, but I warrant that I will trick the governor if you will let me spin the yarn."

"Do what you like," said Albert, feeling great confidence in the boy's ingenuity.

"That's settled, then. Back me up and I will pull you through. I have fixed it with Father Jacques and Therese. As for the handsome hussar who got us into this scrape, I undertake to bring him under my thumb."

The governor's house was near the cathedral, and the prisoners were taken into a hall furnished with pine seats and a few hanging lamps while awaiting the hearing by the functionary. Therese and her father sat down, dull and resigned. Boissier chafed on hearing that the French army was at the gates and half wished that he had not tied himself up with the girl's apron strings when he might rejoin his regiment. On the other hand, Panardel breathed more at ease since he saw that a high authority would have the disposal of him, knowing that authority, spite of its bandage, like Justice, can be lenient to the son of a rich man. Bearing in mind the tight squeeze from Farmer Lecomte's large hands, he prudently took a seat at a respectful distance from the peasant who, however, paid him no attention.

Cocagne, for his part, did not lose sight of the gallant hussar. He wanted to "fix" him, as he called it, and preliminarily made the tour of him to study him. After a summary scrutiny, he opened the conversational fire in the bantering tone peculiar to him.

"Asking your pardon, lieutenant," he said, saluting him soldierly with the utmost gravity, "but it would make me grateful for your complaisance if you would inform me of the time?"

This question, natural enough in itself, became grotesque when one noticed how dilapidated was Panardel's costume; and it was extravagant to suppose that he wore a watch, in pockets of a vest reduced to tatters.

"The time?" he grumbled in a hopeless voice; "you might see that I cannot oblige you. I have been robbed of everything again, my rings, my money and a new watch I had bought for fifty louis."

"Was it a gang of highwaymen who handled you like that?" inquired the boy, assuming a guileless manner.

"Highwaymen who carried lances," screamed Panardel, revived by the recollection into trembling: "Cossacks or Uhlans—I did not distinguish which, as I was so wild with fury."

"You must have been very wild to be so tame now," remarked Cocagne without losing his perfect gravity. "But may I make so bold, my lieutenant, to inquire where this happened? Not in the streets of Troyes, of course, since one cannot travel ten feet

here without stumbling into the arms of a provost-marshal's guard.'

"Would to heaven that I had been assaulted in a town—I should have taught the ruffians a lesson," snarled the hussar with a menacing air.

"I quite agree with you, lieutenant; you sang out for help! a while ago in a voice to which the town-crier's is a feeble whisper. A little more and you would have roused the whole town."

"What did you stop me for?" snarled Panardel, more and more sulky; "if it were not for you being always in the way, I should be in safety in a house I know about."

"But that is a little your own fault, if I may say so out of the respect which I owe to you, lieutenant. We were having a quiet talk on private matters when you tumbled upon us without crying 'Look out!' and my uncle had to lay hold of you to prevent you falling. You ought to be grateful to him."

"Your uncle has far too heavy a hand," muttered Agenor, rubbing his neck.

"So, officer," went on Cocagne, without dwelling on this well-founded reproach, "you met these bad characters on the battle-field?"

"You might guess that," returned Panardel, "do I not look to have been in the worst of it all the day? Am I not in the light-horse which has to go in the first, and has the rear to defend when there is a retiring movement?"

"Just so, lieutenant, and I am ready to believe

you are the best rider in your troop—for you are the first to get into Troyes.”

“And they call the emperor a man of far-sightedness—he who assigned me to the light cavalry, when I should have been so nicely fitted as an officer of the army service train. That is a comfortable arm of the forces; their officers jog along beside the slow wagons, and they will turn up to-morrow without having seen one of those villainous Cossack lances. But we had to show the way for everybody in front of Mery, chokefull of Prussians. There was only one bridge to cross the river on, and that was half burnt. You would think that was an excellent excuse for halting us to have breakfast and rest a little until the repairs were done. Very much so! our cranky general spurred his horse over the charred planks and all the regiment were fools enough to follow him, so that I was carried along. And into the bargain, we met firing in the village, and cavalry that ran at us without saying, ‘We are coming!’ I was knocked off my horse, my clothes torn, battered, lanced, and robbed before I knew what it was all about.”

“But you did pick yourself up, and made good time into Troyes?” inquired the drummer with splendid coolness.

“Indeed, I got away and saved myself,” returned Agenor with the energy of the coward whose spirit was in arms, “and they will not catch me coming to such a spread again, for I have had enough of it at last. It is all very well for those who have nothing

to lose, to get into low rough riots like that; but I am well-off, and I know when I am well-off. My father has ever so much money and he shall pay the bounty again—ay, for two or three substitutes if that must be, while I stay here at our correspondent Potard's, the grocer in a large way—he will stow me away somewhere until all these atrocities are over."

Bossier and the farmer quivered with indignation at hearing this frank confession of pacific principles, and exchanged fiery looks. Therese had shrunk to a corner, where she sat in high disgust. But her cousin seemed to take the greatest interest in the shameful declarations of this hero in spite of himself.

"It appears, then, lieutenant," he said tranquilly, "that you were going to this grocer's on a little sociable visit when we had the advantage of meeting you?"

"Certainly I was hurrying thither, and had it not been for your brutal relative, I might be supping under his roof tree now."

On hearing Panardel's discourteous adjective applied to him, Lecomte started up on his bench, and would have corrected the saucebox if Boissier had not stayed him, for the cornet perceived that the drummer was drawing out the recreant with a view. The boy was evidently born for diplomacy, for none of the feelings showed on his features which the dastardly avowals must have excited. Quite the reverse, for he assumed his most winning air to coax forth further confidences.

"Storekeepers go to bed early in this town," he

remarked, laughing, "and good old Pothooks—I mean Potard, will welcome you better in the morning."

"If these confounded blunderers do not keep us longer."

"There is no danger of that, if you will let me work out your release," said the boy.

"It is my dearest wish!" exclaimed Panardel, eagerly.

"Only, I want to know when our friends are coming."

"Do you mean the French army?"

"Yes; ~~they~~ were coming this way, I thought, to be at Mery."

"I cannot tell," piteously sighed the hussar, not in a position to afford information about an action where he had been maltreated; "but on the way hither were lots of Germans on the flight like me."

"Then I have my means to twist the *Kommantand* round my finger."

The sergeant came to usher all the prisoners into a court-room, through corridors and a guard-room full of soldiers.

"They are taking us to prison," wailed Agenor.

"Excuse me, lieutenant," explained the knowing Cocagne, "but you took us for footpads, and now you see the town hall is a jail. This is not flattering for our good old town of Troyes. We are simply brought up before the justice as though we had kicked up a row in the street. You thought the Prussians were savages like the Russians? Not a

bit of it; they are the most civilized of nations, and you will see that, if we are to be hanged, drawn and quartered, it would be done with all the formalities and some extra trimmings to boot. We have no lawyer, but I shall not ask the court for one, as I am competent to defend the company of us all alone."

The speaker had reason on his side in reckoning on the Teuton's liking for forms, as the important judicial officer who was to decide on their fate made his entry into the courtroom with all the majesty of a Chief-Justice.

CHAPTER XVII.

A POOR EXCUSE IS BETTER THAN NONE.

This police justice was an old, short and obese man. His ruddy face was ornamented with a huge nose, with a violet hue gained in the Berlin beer saloons; his small round eyes, blemished by over-indulgence in strong tobacco, stared like the owl's, and his Falstaffian girth was imperfectly contained within a belt of generous width.

This character out of a farce was followed by a soldier who solemnly carried a monstrous beer-pot, and a colossal china pipe to match. When the orderly had placed these on the desk, much as the servant sets down the glass of water for the lecturer, the civil-military governor took his place on the seat with a leisure full of dignity. Then, gravely settling back in the chair, and letting his gaze wander toward the prisoners, he drew out a horn snuff box and prepared to take a pinch. He was carrying it with a flourish to his nose, when the drummer-boy rose, skipped up to the rail which defended Themis from the public, and held out his snapping fingers with the gesture familiar to confirmed snuffers when soliciting a pinch. This forward request was calculated to shock the justice in epaulets, who made as if to draw away the box, but there is a freemasonry among users of tobacco in every form,

and the box can no more be withheld by the polite than light from a smoker. Therefore Cocagne was tacitly permitted to dip his finger and thumb into the box, which audacious familiarity won him a smile of condescension. To complete the conciliation of his judge, the drummer snuffed the dust with high relish and said with the air of appreciation:

"Excellent, major, most excellent! I wager that the Emperor Napoleon, who is so fond of the weed that he has a special pocket for snuff in his waistcoat, never had better than that?"

Flattered by the comparison, the governor assumed an Olympian pose, and fixed on the speaker a glance which he fancied was perspicacious.

"Who are you, my boy?" he said in French, but with a strong accent which it is needless to reproduce.

"A drummer, major, a mere drummer, and a prisoner of war into the bargain."

"And all those folk?" continued the justice, lighting his pipe with all the care befitting the operation.

"Two French officers captured like myself at Montmirail by the ever-victorious armies of the Allied Emperors, major, together with a couple of citizens of this place."

"Since you are prisoners," said the justice with kindly mien, "how is it that you get yourself taken up in the street at the hour when you should have been in the quarters assigned you, and why did you disturb the good folk with your shouting?"

"I was going to tell you the story, major," returned the boy with innocent expression; "the two officers whom you behold are out on parole, and I, who have not the advantage of rank, was let loose, so to say, to be their orderly. Hence—"

"Stop a bit, little drummer," interrupted the governor, with a cunning look, "it seems to me that you did not properly brush that one's coat," referring to Panardel's dilapidated uniform.

"That's nothing, major, for he is the dandy of our army, but his things were tumbled about in our arrest. When I fix him up for parade, bless you, he is almost as gorgeous as one of your Uhlans. As a proof that I can *valet* to rights, just give an eye to the other officer," added the lad, pointing to Boissier, who was biting his lips with rage and impatience.

The Prussian nodded his head like a man who was up to the mark in military bearing, and pursued his interrogations after absorbing two noble glasses of the beer. "But you have not explained the riot? I guess that it was about the woman, for you French are always making fools of yourselves over the fair sex!" chuckled the major, and making Therese blush.

"It was not that, though you almost hit it," said Cocagne in haste, for he feared an untimely outbreak from Lecomte. "It was just this way. We were going along peacefully, when this occurred. The public lamps are not lit every night, and it was as black as an oven by the cathedral, where my officer yonder, being in the front, ran against the

civilian, and the two grappled and fell about and abused one another, so that your vigilant patrol of course ran up and netted the lot of us. That is the whole of it, and there's not a grain of mischief in it."

Visibly shaken by the narrator's sincerity of tone, the governor questioned the only German witness of the scene, the sergeant, who bore the boy's evidence out.

"It looks as though you were speaking the truth," said the major. "I will just hear the townsman's version, and——"

"Don't take the trouble to question him, governor, for the poor soul is as deaf as a post," said Cocagne with rare impudence, while he darted a look on Lecomte for him not to contradict him. "I will answer for him, to save time, and tell you the drollest part of the adventure. This honest old chap lives in the same house as where we are lodged, and we were all making for the same point when we fell upon one another like the cards in a card-castle."

He continued his appealing glance to his uncle, who had hard work to restrain himself.

"Where is the house you speak of?" inquired the governor; "it must be a big one to lodge so many souls."

"Not far, and if you will send me to it, I will bring back the owner, the celebrated grocer in a large way, whose honorable name is Potard."

The cornet began to understand. The trick would win, if the German allowed the cunning boy to have five minutes' talk with the storekeeper, who

would gladly tell a white lie in favor of his rich town correspondent's son. The release of Panardel meant the release of all, and the rest might be easy.

Reclining in his chair, the military Solomon was in no hurry to decide on the thorny question.

"I will order this grocer to be brought here," he said after five minutes, as he turned to repeat the order to the sergeant. "Where does he keep his store?"

This sending of a stranger did not suit the scheme, and Cocagne hastened to raise a difficulty.

"I was going to say, major, that I know the house very well, but not the name of the street. I have not been long in town and I am not given to roaming about."

"But I know where Potard lives," interposed Panardel stupidly; "it is in the Bishop's Square, the first store on the right going from here."

It was scarcely possible to be more awkward, and spite of the difference in rank, Cocagne could have beaten the blunderer who upset his designs. On account of the judge's presence, he had to be satisfied with casting a scornful look upon him, happily remarked by Boissier alone. Fortunately the sergeant's ignorance came into play.

"Well," said the governor, when convinced of his subordinates incapacity to go into the streets without a guide, "I will send you with the sergeant, boy, but keep the others as hostages."

"That is right, major," returned the drummer, delighted by the turn the current was taking, "you

will not have to smoke many pipes, for I will bring the grocer in a jiffy. Still, if you would let this officer come along, too," indicating Panardel, "M. Potard would move more briskly, for a drummer will have little sway over a respectable tradesman, while my officer would make it clear in a minute."

The governor, who was not rapid in coming to conclusions, again sank into profound meditation.

"I consent," at last he observed. "The sergeant will take four men to keep guard of you, but I notify you, little drummer, that I shall send the others into prison if you are not back before my pipe is smoked out. Be off, little drummer," the equitable magistrate added, as he enveloped himself in a nicotian cloud.

Cocagne waited for no more, he pulled Panardel by the sleeve into rising and coming with the sergeant.

"We shall have Potard back with us before he is half through," he calculated on marking the capacity of the pipe-chronometer.

Several minutes subsequently, the little party were again perambulating the streets, Cocagne and Panardel in the midst of the squad, with the sergeant swinging a lantern. The hussar cornet, whose dull brain had not clearly followed the sly lad's stratagem, only understood one thing, that they were going to find a bail in the person of his father's trade-friend, the grocer. But the drummer deemed it useful to inculcate the lesson to be recited before the tradesman.

"Asking your pardon, lieutenant," he inquired, lowering his voice in the improbable event of one of the foreigners understanding French, "what sort of a man is your papa's correspondent?"

"He is a very well-to-do man, and has a comfortable house, where he can give me a bed, in which I shall be at my ease," replied the sybarite, always dwelling on his personal comfort.

"I am not worried on that score. I want only to know if he is a sharp rogue, able to help me stuff the fat major with lies."

"Lies! Do you imagine that he will injure himself and me, too, to extricate you from a dilemma?" exclaimed Panardel, with the bluntness of a perfect egotist.

"Lieutenant, I take the liberty of relying on you to back me up in my little fiction and bend him to it."

"What? the stuff you have palmed upon the honest justice? not at all, not in the least. I do not know you, and I don't like to meddle with what does not concern me."

"Still, I think that it does concern you a little," replied the boy, softly. "If the governor finds that I have been gammoning him, he will not make any fine difference between us, but box you up in the stone cage along with the rest."

Panardel replied merely with a moan to this very likely suggestion.

"This does not include," went on Cocagne, calmly, "that, if our Allied Heroes have to cut

away from here to-night, or to-morrow, the French who march in will imagine that you deserted at Mery."

"No such a thing!" protested the hussar; "I had my horse killed and I came here to buy one at the regular market."

"Hem!" coughed the drummer. "The provost-marshal will not see it in that light, and he will not smoothe over matters as I expect you can get Potard to do."

"But how?" gasped Panardel, shaken by the boy's unfaltering coolness.

"I haven't the time to lay down the plan before you; but if you will back me up and say Amen, in the right places, I bet I will mold the old chap to my pattern."

"Do anything you like," sighed Agenor, "but do not get me into any trouble."

Debouching upon Bishop Square, the house and store of Potard, stood out as token that the grocer did finely with his merchandise. The shutters were up, but there were lights on the parlor floor overhead.

"Good luck!" exclaimed Cocagne, "the old boy has not gone to bed."

On the door being pointed out by Panardel who was anxious to get out of the quandary, the sergeant pounded roughly on it with his musket butt. Nobody ran to open, but the lights were snuffed out.

"That is odd," muttered the boy; "can the tradesman be plotting something against the King of Prussia that he will not open to his soldiers?"

The Prussians seemed inclined to beat the panels in, and Cocagne saw no harm in force being employed to obtain the hearing he wanted. Still, second thought suggested that it was a poor method of winning the dealer to his side, and he determined to essay persuasion. Making the sergeant a sign to go softly, he stepped up to the portals, and clapped an ear to the keyhole.

Doubtless the Prussian submitted to the ascendancy of the sprightly boy. His ignorance of Parisian slang and the French tongue deprived him of the pleasure of enjoying the lad's jests, but he could at least relish his grimaces, and they had completely captivated him. It was plain that he kept a serious countenance before the capers from respect for his rank, but he enjoyed the fun inwardly. Hence he offered no opposition to the youth taking the lead so freely, and the boy could play the eavesdropper at his ease, while the soldiers stood at ease also leaning on their gun.

Cocagne's idea was not bad, for he heard muffled steps furtively approaching the outlet. Straining his sense of hearing, he advised silence to the others by the classical gesture of waving them back with the open hand. The sound abruptly ceased, with the probability that the person within was applying his eye to the orifice in the lock to scrutinize the strangers. Cocagne did not mean to give him the time, for he stood up against the door to intercept the visual ray. He beckoned Panardel to draw near.

"Call him by his name," he whispered; "he will recognize your voice and open to us."

The sub-lieutenant, heretofore resigned to obeying his inferior, showed little eagerness to oblige; but Cocagne employed an irresistible argument.

"Do you prefer the Prussians lugging us back to the lock-up?" he muttered in the gay hussar's ear. "The major will see we were hoaxing him; but I don't care, for I shall get it lighter than you."

Panardel quivered at the mention of prison; he saw himself dragged before a council of war and made to account for his retirement from the field of Mery. This was more than ample to move him, and he took his sweetest voice to charm his father's correspondent.

"Potard — M. Potard;" he called on the high notes, "open the door, it is I, Panardel, your correspondent's son. Open quick, as I have urgent business with you. I am wounded," added the hussar, who had the art of lying and embellished his tale.

He had grounds to rely on this appeal to Potard's compassion, for the key could be instantly heard turning in the lock.

Cocagne drew aside and shoved Agenor forward, with the view of presenting to the trader's eyes his acquaintance and prevent the slamming of the door on the nose of the stranger.

"Put it to him hot," he prompted the lieutenant, "and hug him before he can shut us out."

More and more swayed by the drummer, Agenor

leaped upon the grocer as soon as he opened the door and hugged him with affectionate fury. Surprised and frightened by this attack, the man nearly let fall a candle he held in hand, and receded with a grumbling outcry:

"Not so much noise, M. Panardel, not so loud!"

The drummer had already slipped in by the door while ajar. He opened it to its full width, so as to usher in the soldiers and sergeant, whom this incident seemed to rejoice. The grocer welcomed this irruption with smothered screams of fright and tried to beat a retreat.

Always confident of his eloquence, Cocagne spoke to calm the tradesman and explain matters.

"Greeting to the principal grocer of Troyes!" he said, gravely saluting with his hand to his shako, "whom I beseech to overlook our indiscretion in penetrating his domicile at an untimely hour."

"What do you want?" demanded Potard, succeeding in freeing himself from the embrace of the young man, but less and less at ease.

"In a minute I will make this as clear as your olive oil, worthy M. Potard," went on Cocagne with imperturbable calmness, "but we should talk all the better if you were to conduct us to your parlor over the store, where my lieutenant will not be sorry to have a rest."

"Upstairs—in my parlor?" stammered the grocer, giving unequivocal tokens of terror, "that's impossible; I have company."

"Oh, do not let that distress you, for we can

make ourselves at home in any society, and we shall not detain you long."

"I entreat you, M. Potard," Panardel supported him; "for my father's sake."

"But it is not you I object to," faltered the storekeeper, "it is these soldiers; they would never do."

"Oh, is it the German gentlemen who bother you," struck in the drummer. "Wait, I will manage that."

This parley had taken place in a passage which opened into the capacious stores of Potard, and by the feeble candle light piles of sugar loaves in pyramids, bags of coffee, and rows of bottles in every shape could be seen.

"Schnapps," larconically observed the boy, pointing out the inviting show to the sergeant.

"Ja, ja!" replied the under officer, glaring at the heaps of delicacies as the Jews at the Egyptian fleshpots.

"Here is the way to manage it, venerable merchant," said Cocagne, "serve up some strong drink to our military friends and they will wait very patiently till you come down."

"My brandy?" groaned Potard; "they will drink every drop and pay me with an order on the king of Prussia's treasury."

"You need not waste brandy on them; open a demijohn of something strong, and they won't be dainty if it scratches their gullet."

Driven into his last ditch, influenced by the idea that he might charge this to the Panardel account

the grocer yielded regretfully to let the soldiers into his store, where they did not require dragging. Seduced like his subordinates the sergeant only took the precaution to lock the street door and pocket the key. When the escort were installed before a large bottle of alcohol, labeled as made in Champagne, but having no affinity with the wine of that name, the drummer shouted gaily:

"Up we go! May we be as jolly when we get through our private business."

It was against his will that the trader led his forced guests through his house, and with a pain at the heart he preceded Panardel and the younger man on the stairs. At every step he turned to try to see how the soldiers were dealing with his goods. The drummer laughed up his sleeve and amused himself by frightening him while pretending to cheer him up.

"Don't be uneasy, good M. Potard," he said, "the Germans care for nothing but pork and spirits. You will lose nothing but half a dozen hams, and at the sixth or eighth bottle of home-made cognac they will be under the counter."

Potard replied with a groan to such ironical consolation, but continued to ascend, heroically abandoning the stores to the ogres. But he hesitated, more oppressed by an unknown woe than by the destruction of his *delicatessen*. This misery did not escape the wary eye of the drummer, who had not forgotten the illumination going out when the musket butt thumped the door, or the infinite care Potard

had shown in opening it. Evidently the house contained guests whom it was desirable to secrete, and this lent itself to the plotter's designs too well for him not to seek the clue.

Stopping on the first floor landing, Potard did not show any intention of going farther. With his frightened demeanor and the candle shaking in his hand, he looked the conspirator caught in the act.

"How is this?" challenged the drummer with effrontery, "are you going to discuss matters with your chief correspondent's son on the stairway?"

"I am sorry, but, as I told you below, I have company, and—and I would like better to get over it here."

Agenor made a sour face, but he did not rebel like his companion, who said in a light way:

"I would not go contrary to you for anything in the world, excellent M. Potard, but I always stutter when I talk standing, and if we stay jabbering here, those Prussians will swallow all the good things in stock."

This argument influenced the dealer.

"We must step into the parlor, I see," he said with celerity prompted by commercial reasons, "but the persons there are not known to you, and——"

"We will make their acquaintance," interrupted Cocagne, who shrank from nothing.

The master of this inhospitable house passed on with a vexed face, opening a door and showing them into a sitting-room, badly lit by only one light. The drummer noticed that the shutters were closed and

the curtains drawn together. Three persons, two women and a man, were seated near the fireplace on chairs upholstered in yellow velvet—a fashionable color. The grocer's quiet entrance did not excite the least stir in the little party, but when the uniforms of the cornet and the drummer appeared, all sprang to their feet with a quickness which much resembled fright. Panardel looked at the alarm with a dull eye, but Cocagne recognized the three. It was at the Countess de Muire's residence that he had seen them when in attendance on the Russian prince, and while the ladies were the countess herself and her niece Cecile de Saintclair, he saw that the gentleman was an old fop who was called the Vidame de Branscourt. Vidames were the noblemen chosen of old to defend churchmen and their property.

"Potard picks out lofty guests," observed the boy, nudging Panardel.

"The Countess de Muire!" exclaimed Panardel, no less astounded than his companion at seeking persons of quality under a tradesman's roof.

"Do you know me, monsieur?" haughtily demanded the old lady, majestically advancing toward the speaker.

"Yes, madame," faltered the hussar; "I was presented to you a fortnight ago or so, by your relative, my friend and brother-officer, Albert Boissier. I am Panardel—Agenor Panardel, as M. Potard will assure you."

"I do not recall the name very clearly," observed

the dame, who had no memory but for titles of nobility.

"Nay, nay," interposed the old beau, to whom Agenor had paid some extravagant compliments, "I remember the gentleman perfectly, and he is of the right way of thinking."

In his aristocratic mouth, this expression implied that Panardel was but a lukewarm patriot and it set the lady at ease.

"Excuse my poor head," said she in a less cutting tone, "and allow me to inquire to what happy event I owe the pleasure of again meeting you?"

"Why, to tell the truth," stammered the hussar, "I—I have been arrested, and want to speak to M. Potard—"

"Arrested? is the Usurper already at our gates?" asked the nobleman with disquiet.

"The Usurper? he means the Little Corporal?" thought the drummer. "I think I have the grip I want. These people wanted to keep out the police."

The fearless boy, who had hitherto kept behind his superior, strutted gracefully into the middle of the parlor.

"Asking your pardon, madame countess," he began, stretching out his leg before him as he made a bow, like an officer doing the parade step.

"Who are you, pray?" asked the countess disdainfully.

"Auguste Cocagne, senior drummer of the Ninth Marching Regiment, at your ladyship's service, if I can do anything for you!" returned he unabashed.

This announcement of the speaker's social position caused the countess to turn her back, and go and sit beside her charming niece who was looking on with startled eyes.

"To put it in a nutshell, the case stands thus," said the boy. "We are all in custody—me, to begin with, and get me out of the way, as you do not care for me; the lieutenant here present, who has had the advantage to drag his sabertasche about your carpet heretofore; and your kinsman, Cornet Albert Boissier of the Seventh Dragoons. We come to M. Potard to have him get us off, but since your ladyship is here, you should have the office by virtue of your rank."

"Arrested—by whom? my relative, alas!"

"Oh, only by the Prussian patrol; but as I saw that you greeted all the Allied generals in your house, we shall be let off at once, if you will say a couple of words to the governor, and I am sure that Cornet Boissier will lose no time to present his thanks to you and to the young lady over there."

"I do not know that I can act thus," said the lady, visibly embarrassed; "my intervention might go for little at such a time, and again—"

"What's the hindrance? because our boys are marching upon Troyes and the sourkrout-eaters will be marching out? All the stronger reason, my lady; the fat major will think more about packing up to decamp than of detaining us, and this does not include that my cornet might not be a bad card in your hand if the Emperor pops into this place to-morrow."

The sly boy had kept this argument for his final one, and he could soon judge of its effect on the lady.

"Hark ye!" said she abruptly, "you seem a lad of good sense."

"I have been told so, my lady."

"I shall therefore speak frankly to you. My friends and I have good motives for not appearing in public while the Ogre—ahem! Emperor stays in Troyes. That is the reason for our favoring this honest man with our company, he being one of my purveyors," continued the countess, nodding to Portard. "The Corsican's soldiery may arrive this same night, and I do not desire to go out; but I can write in favor of my relative's son."

"Excuse me, countess," said Cocagne, pulling his forelock in perplexity; "but along with your kinsman is also my uncle and his daughter."

"What are you coming to," said the dame haughtily, who began to suspect some hoax, "what is there in common between M. Boissier, the banker's nephew, and your family?"

Cocagne was going to make some kind of an answer, when a violent knocking came at the grocery door.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PRISONERS IN A NEW LIGHT.

At this noise the guests of the grocer stared at one another in amaze. Each had reasons to fear an unforeseen event. The countess and the noble dreaded the entry of the French forces. Potard trembled for his merchandise and Panardel for his precious person. In spite of the large dose of confidence with which Cocagne was endowed, he did not feel assured.

The stranger who knocked so imperiously might be a foe—whether he came from the major to ask for his prisoners to return, or a mere visitor. Hence everybody listened, and none hastened to open the door.

The hammering came again with double energy. At each blow, shaking the door, the master of the house shuddered, like nervous women when a pistol is let off in a playhouse.

“Go and see who that is,” said Madame de Muire, who felt it beneath her dignity to show any more fear.

The errand did not please the storekeeper, who seemed riveted to the spot.

“But, my lady,” faltered he, “would it not be better to lead them to think that nobody is at home? The windows are closed, no light can be seen from without and if we are not heard in the street—”

"How about our Prussians in your store?" interrupted the boy; "do you think they will not be heard in the street? If they had their *quantum* I should say nothing, but if they are not full, they will be making enough noise to attract all the patrols in the town to your door. Hark, how quiet they are!"

Indeed, a formidable racket of smashed bottles arose from the store with a chorus of merry vociferations, as a protest against the grocer's ideas of quiet.

The tradesman lifted his hands in token of despair and rushed out upon the stairs. His interest in his stock overpowered his fear.

In fact, the riot among the revelers had been heard in the street, for the knocking became a continuous roll. The caller, whoever he was, had made up his mind not to go away, and the door would have to be opened. The guests held their peace in the parlor to listen, and the countess did not think to inquire the end of Cocagne's revelations.

Soon the sound of an irritated voice arose, mingled with Potard's infinitely more gentle accents. It was no puzzle to see that the stranger, on being admitted, was abusive for having been so long kept waiting. To this colloquy succeeded another in German with the sergeant, the imperious tone of the newcomer clearly indicating that he held a rather high rank in the army.

"Can it be the fat major who has finished his pipe and is coming after us?" mused Cocagne; but on second thoughts he said between his teeth: "How foolish I am—he does not know the way. Deuce

take me if I can guess who is the individual who comes to disturb us."

They heard steps rapidly coming up the stairs, and soon spurred boot-heels rang in the ante-room. The door flew abruptly open, and a man in scarlet uniform strode in.

"May I die a dog's death if I am not out of luck!" muttered the drummer, who had prudently stepped aside; "it is the Red Hussar."

The tall, fair-faced hussar, who had abducted Therese, was now bowing to the countess, who had recovered self-possession.

"In heaven's name—what is going on? Has the Usurper already occupied the town?" she asked.

"Not yet, lady," replied the Austrian, "but our troops have been retiring since this morning, and the enemy's vanguard may be before these gates before daybreak. Your servants informed me that you had taken refuge here, and I come from my general to tell you that he is obliged to quit your mansion this night, and also to complain of how things are going on there."

"And pray, what is going on, monsieur?" said the lady, dryly, for her sympathy with the Allies would not support this man's saucy tone.

"One of your servants has dared to go into his private suite and assist in the escape of a girl whom the general's wife had chosen, at some expense, for her maid, and I bear the order to bring this person back by force if I must, should she be here."

"I am not aware of being charged with the keep

of my guests' waiting-maids," retorted the lady, losing all patience, "and I point out to you that your action is most impertinent."

"Perfectly so, perfectly," interposed the old beau, feeling obliged to support his noble friend; "and I assert upon my honor that no French gentleman would accept such an errand."

"Do you mean to insult me?" exclaimed the hussar, red as his jacket with rage.

"Take it as you please," returned the old dandy, assuming a lofty attitude, with his hand on his hip; "I am quite ready to give you satisfaction, Captain—Minden, I believe?"

"The Emperor of Austria does not allow his officers to lose their time fighting in single combat during a campaign," said the cavalrist, who had passed from red to pale green; "but I am as nobly born as you, and when we shall have taken Paris, I will come back to meet you."

"Faugh! I daresay your ancestors were catching wild horses in the Brandenburg marshes, while mine were hewing down the heathen in the crusades," replied the proud old noble; "but, let that pass, you wear a sword, and I shall be ready for you whenever you like."

The countess thought this a meet opportunity for her to put an end to this exchange of amenities.

"Captain," she said, with cold dignity to the intruder, "I have had to remind you that you were addressing a lady of quality; but from consideration for the sovereign you serve, I will inform you that

you labor under an error. I am sure of my household, and none of them would do anything against a guest."

"This was a sort of page who was seen to climb your garden wall by the help of ladders."

"I have not a young man in all my service!" interrupted the offended lady.

"I am afraid you are forgetting me," interrupted Cocagne, suddenly quitting the corner where he had remained unnoticed, and exposing his tattered attire to the rays of the dim lamp.

This abrupt appearance had a theatrical effect.

"What does this malapert want?" exclaimed the hussar, who had not had time to recognize the youthful warrior of Eclaron Farm.

"Good evening, officer—have you been burning any more farmhouses?" impudently demanded the boy. "You don't remember me? yet no great time has elapsed since you wanted to shoot me in Soulaines wood."

"The scamp who tried to run away with our calash!" roared the hussar in furious. "It is you, then, who helped this girl to escape?" he added, stepping forward to collar the boy.

"Hold on, captain," returned the latter, eluding him; "you ought to know that I am not so easily caught as all that. Oh, you came and stole my cousin Therese to titivate up your hawk-nosed general's wife, and thought we would let you do it? Not a bit of it, my beanpole in a red rag—I let her loose out of the cage, and before you lay hold of

her again, the boys will be swarming into Troyes and you will be flying for your life without waiting for your change."

"You see, countess, that I was not wrong;" coolly said the Red Hussar; "the rascal actually boasts of his deed, and I find him beside you in this parlor. You must own that it is very odd, anyway."

The stupefied countess could find no answer. The other bystanders could not understand any better the queer imbroglio of which Cocagne held held the key. But after having poured invectives on the enemy, the boy wrapped himself in silence, folding his arms with supreme indifference.

Greatly alarmed about the sequel to this mishap, Panardel pulled the boy's sleeve without drawing any relief from him.

"I have no more to do here," said the hussar with constrained choler, "and you will please let me withdraw, countess, with my excuse for depriving you of a faithful servant. As for you, knave, follow me to a place where there are people who know how to make birds sing that won't sing."

"They will fail with me, officer, for I have lost my voice," replied Cocagne quietly.

"Wait a bit, you saucebox!" roared the Austrian, rushing out of the room.

"A pleasant journey! don't hurry yourself!" shouted the boy, while the long-legged cavalier was going down the stairs four at a time.

"Why, you must be crazy," moaned Panardel. "He has gone for the soldiers in the store who will

haul us back before the governor, and we are ruined."

"Those men? get along with you! they have tucked in five bottles each and they will be sleeping under the counter. All my hope is that the fat major has not smoked his pipe," he said less unconcernedly. "However, we have only to listen at the top of the stairs to learn what is going on in this respectable establishment."

He left the parlor without remembering to salute the ladies. The grocer, still trembling for his merchandise, and Panardel, who was nearly out of his senses, mechanically followed him out upon the landing. From this post of observation they did not lose a note. Already was rising the uproar of varied oaths which the Red Hussar cast on the Prussian warriors, but no voice responded to him. Only at intervals when he paused to take breath did the drone of a snore sonorously fill up the gap.

"I wager that it is the sergeant's proboscis that makes that melody," muttered Cocagne. "When a man has his fill of schnapps he always plays the organ in that style."

Another and a sharper noise burst from time to time in the store, and drew mournful exclamations from the good Potard; it was the crash of broken glass, and the boy with his wit as fine as his hearing, immediately found the elucidation.

"The officer is trying to set them on their pins, but they slip through his hands and go—slap! on the broken bottles again. He will have to give that

up as a bad job, and come and have it out with us single-handed. That gives me an idea how to fix him; and if you will lend me a hand, we might bind him hand and foot and bundle him into the cellar, while we cut back to the Commandant and release our friends."

"You are mad," returned the grocer, "did you not see he has a sword?"

"A saber, you should say; tush! I have met tooth-picks before, in my time. I undertake to disarm him; but come along, valorous and well-to-do Portard!"

The grocer showed undoubted terror and seemed no way disposed to co-operate in the youth's war-like plans. Before he could open his mouth to shape his objections, the Austrian officer darted out of the store holding in hand an object not clearly defined.

"Look out!" cried Cocagne, drawing back quickly: "he's drawn a pistol, but as he comes up to shoot at you, I will hide here on the stairs and grab him by the leg."

The ruse might have succeeded, spite of the cowardice of the two, but the hussar's unexpected movement upset the stratagem. He strode straight to the street door, unlocked it and went out, slammed it shut, locked it double—and his spurs jingled on the pavement as he rapidly departed. All that was audible was the snoring.

"Idiot that I am!" groaned Cocagne, beating his breast: "I never thought of the door-key which that

thick headed sergeant put in his pocket. The officer came across it in feeling his coat and now we are locked in."

"You may as well say that we are utterly destroyed," panted Panardel in a lamentable voice.

"And through you, too," growled the grocer, sulkily, "you had no need to insult that officer."

"Go calmly, Potard, go calmly, papa!" said the drummer, who set the example, for he re-entered into his usual coolness after the first surprise was passed. "Hang it all, you must have another key!"

"I have a latch key, certainly, but it will not open the door when it is double-locked."

"But the ground floor windows—they are not so small that only cats can go through?"

"They are all barred," grumbled the tradesman; do you think that my store can be entered like a free and open church?"

"Your bars were very useful to keep the Prussians from your brandy, eh?"

"Because you cheated me into opening my door," almost screamed Potard at the acme of exasperation.

"Amiable dealer in sandy sugar and chicory coffee, this is no moment for us to dispute," said the lad tranquilly. "Let us behave more wisely by returning to the parlor in order to set at ease that society which is its own best ornament, and by all six laying our heads together, we may scare up enough common sense to devise the means to foil the Red Hussar on his stork legs."

Having nothing better to suggest, the two fol-

lowed the drummer with a sulky mien, to see him make his reappearance among the aristocrats with the deportment acquired from the late Camouffe, drum-major and master of the arts and graces. Engaged in an animated dialogue with the old beau, the countess did not, we fear, sufficiently appreciate Cocagne's courtesy.

"What deplorable manners these Germans have," the old dame was saying; "really, I don't know but what I prefer the soldiers of Buonaparte."

"My dear friend, I fear that you will have only too good an opportunity to make the comparison, as the mad Usurper may come this night. I thought I heard great guns out by the Paris gate."

"The bull dogs have been growling these ten minutes," thus Cocagne joined the conversation; then, drawing the curtains without waiting for permission and opening the window, he let in the dull rumble of a cannonade, passing over the town like the warning blast of a tempest.

The streets were filled with confused shouts and bugle calls; artillery trains galloped by, smashing the stones under their heavy wheels. It was clear that an important action was going on at the town gates, and that the Allies, alarmed by a sudden attack, were concentrating to defend their headquarters.

"Merciful powers, what will become of us!" murmured the countess' young niece.

"Fear nothing," said the old noble; "if M. de Buonaparte should enter the place, Cornet Boissier will protect you."

Mlle. de Saintclair said nothing, but she blushed, and Cocagne remarked the significant symptom.

"The mischief of it is," put in the cunning youth, without betraying that he had heard this name, "that the countess' cousin is still in the grip of the Prussians; and I think we ought to be on the move if we are to get him out of the hole."

"But, my friend," said Madame de Muire, "as this testimony comes on behalf of a soldier of the Usurper, will it be enough to secure my relative's liberation?"

"I answer for that, and if the cornet is free I warrant to boot that he will give a fine lift to his friends when the Little Corporal is here."

"We may very much need that, my fair friend," said the beau in a whisper; "particularly myself, who has been flaunting the white cockade for this fortnight."

"Well, Potard, you had better go with this young g—g—man."

"But how?" sighed the distracted store-keeper; "we are locked in."

"Why, by the window, of course," replied the drummer of the Ninth.

"Never!" emphatically declared Potard; "twenty feet off the ground! I have no desire to break my leg."

"Then I shall go alone," said the boy, running to the window opened.

"But," remonstrated the prudent Agenor, "I can not go either. Besides, it will amount to nothing,

for the governor will want to know what you have done with his sergeant and the file."

"I will tell him that they were taken into the column to be marched into the action, and it would be odd if he *smelt a rat*. Once, twice, will you come, lieutenant? No? Then, goodnight, ladies and gentlemen!"

Without losing a second, the boy pulled down one of the canary colored curtains which were the pride of Potard's parlor, twisted it into a rope of which he tied one end fast to the window bar, and slung himself astride of the ledge.

"My curtains, my beautiful curtains, which I had from Paris!" wailed the grocer.

"We shall soon meet again!" was the drummer's farewell, as he slid down to the pavement.

CHAPTER XIX.

IT IS SOMETIMES GOOD TO HAVE A MASTER.

Cocagne had the bump of locality.

As soon as he reached the street, without accident, he chose his course by the shortest line for the town hall.

"Heaven only knows if I shall arrive in time," he muttered, while stretching his legs. "The major's pipe is a large one, but Potard was so long-winded, to say nothing about the Hussar in his seven-leagued boots, who may get in before me. Pooh, I am not so long in the legs as he, but I go quicker, and I shall have time to tie the old fogey up in a knot of my own contrivance before that lengthy imbecile shows his long nose in the court room."

These reflections had some foundation in sense, and the boy in his easy apparel might have outraced the cavalryman in his tight clothes, but the former had reckoned without the state of the streets. The hasty movement of the garrison had filled the thoroughfares, ordinarily deserted at such a period. At every instant, Cocagne heard the patrol's heavy and regular step, and he lost precious minutes in eluding the watch. This carried with it the consolation that it forebode the near arrival of the French. Under other circumstances, the boy need have done nothing but skulk in a corner until the army of de-

liverance marched in; but the brave drummer did not mean to leave his friends in custody. He had already invented a fresh yarn in which to entangle the governor, and he hoped to procure their liberty under cover of the disorder.

But from having to dodge the Prussians, he was half-an-hour behindhand in reaching the town hall. When he stood before it all was dark, and the most complete silence reigned. He could enter at the main gateway without being challenged. The guard room was empty, and not a soldier was visible. He did not linger here to wait for a solution of the riddle. But, pushing on, he easily found the corridor leading to the court room.

He ran up the passage and forthwith pushed open the door of the sanctuary of justice. A fresh surprise awaited him there; every living thing had disappeared. The magistrate in epaulets, and those he had to try, all had vanished as by enchantment. The lamp still burning on the justice's desk and an odor of tobacco alone lingered to attest that the drummer had not been dreaming.

"By the sword of Mars," muttered the drummer, "I have arrived too late. Such is the result of dallying with a grocer. But where the deuce could they have all gone to?"

After having roamed about and ferreted in every corner without lighting on the slightest sign of those he sought for, the boy determined to go upon the next floor. Nothing was there but detached articles testifying to a precipitate removal; not one living being.

"Beyond a doubt, the fat major has evacuated the camp," he said as sadly he took the stairway. "What a mistake to rely on the German's devotion to smoking."

Suddenly the drummer, who was still listening, notwithstanding his rebuff, heard steps in the passage below. He began most softly to go down in order to examine the stranger unseen if he could. It took him only a few seconds to reach the bottom step. Here he hugged the wall and waited.

The footsteps went away, and he heard a door open and shut almost instantly with violence.

"This seems somebody with business for the governor," he conjectured.

He distinguished that the sound came from the courtroom, and he suspected that the late visitor was somehow mixed up with the events of this night. The steps drew nearer, loudly ringing on the lobby slabs.

"He's wearing spurs," muttered the boy who well knew the metallic ring of a cavalryman's tread. "Can it be Lieutenant Boissier?"

Imbued with this gladdening and not improbable idea, he decided to quit his post so as not to lose time, and to walk to meet the stranger. He had not gone half up the corridor before he keenly regretted he had so ventured. A lantern forgotten by the fugitives, illumined the passage. In its glare the two nocturnal promenaders met face to face.

On the instant the drummer recognized the Red Hussar, and he wanted to take a retrograde step. It

was too late, for the Austrian had seen him. He drew his saber without hesitating and moved upon him.

"At last I have you, miserable imp," he said, grinding his teeth; "and this time you shall not escape me."

"We shall see about that, you kidnapper!" retorted the drummer, making a face at the abductor of the farmer's fair daughter.

This taunt, accompanied by the grimace, struck home so truly that the hussar rushed upon the speaker with rage. The direct thrust he delivered would have nailed the boy to the wall if he had not stooped at the right moment, so that the steel shivered up to the hilt against the stones. Meanwhile the agile youth, who had similarly evaded attacks of the municipal guards of Paris, glided between his legs and dashed at full speed out into the street.

He kept on running straight before him; the valiant drummer did not try to select a route until he threw the pursuer off the track. The man-hunt began with the game having many chances in his favor, thanks to his start and the slenderness of his frame. But the hunter kept his distance if he did not gain, and, moreover, raised shouts for the soldiers to stay the fugitive as they wandered in the public ways. On all sides vociferations in German thundered, and the likelihood was that the boy would be stopped.

"If I let them catch me, I am done for," he thought as he meditated some new device.

Bayonets began to glitter in front, and he threw himself swiftly into a cross street, but at its end he spied a troop of cavalry. The hurried steps of the hussar approached.

"The game is played," said Cocagne, philosophically; "I am trapped like a fox in his lair. In ten minutes they will shoot me, with my back to that wall."

But the next instant he just restrained a whoop of joy.

"Talk about luck; I am in the thick of it."

Chance does things nicely sometimes. It had guided his steps to the very street where he lived under the patronage of Prince Zodreff, and it was before his residence, that he stopped, although he had to confess he had run at random. The windows were brilliantly lit up. Perplexity and the rapidity of the race had prevented him recognizing landmarks on a road that ought to be familiar to him.

"If my Russ has got home safe from the fight, I am safe," he thought as he darted into the doorway, where the doors were not fastened by a continuance of his fortune.

Up to the next floor he climbed. He opened a door without any ceremony and tumbled into a vast hall where the prince, seated in an easy chair, was sipping cumin-brandy in a large glass, while two soldiers were hastily packing up wearing apparel.

"Oh, is it you, little drummer," queried Zodreff tranquilly; "glad to see you; your frantic country-

men have been besieging me with their confounded incessant firing, and I am getting tired of it."

"Phew!" sighed the lad, dropping into a chair. "Greeting to you, my prince, but I am afraid that I have not much of a heart to liven your highness."

"Why not, what is the matter, little drummer?" inquired the boyar, drinking.

"Ask this flamingo," replied Cocagne, as the Red Hussar bounded into the room.

With his eyes protruding out of his head and his face flaming, the persecutor of the drummer furiously brandished the fragment of his blade.

"What is this to signify, monsieur, and why do you take the liberty to enter my presence in this fashion?" challenged the Muscovite, rising quickly.

Minden wanted to reply in his own language, but the prince cut him short.

"Speak French, monsieur, it distracts me," he suggested in the tone which converted it into an order.

"Well, your highness, I come to punish this little limb of Satan as he deserves," responded the Austrian, conforming to the advice.

"This servant of mine? Do you deserve punishment, boy?" inquired the prince unconcernedly.

"Never!" was Cocagne's reply; "it is just the other way about; for he deserves hanging rather than the twelve bullets of a firing party, as I will prove if allowed."

"I am afraid you will have to prove that, little drummer," observed the Russ, resuming his seat.

"What, would your highness let me be insulted by that scapegrace accusing me in your presence?" remonstrated the hussar in a voice tremulous with rage.

"It seems to me that you are shifting places," said Zodreff, without being daunted by the intruder's swagger. "You rush in here to claim with violence a soldier who is under my safeguard, and you talk about shooting or flogging him. The man defends himself, which meseems is quite natural, and I am bent upon hearing his reasons before surrendering him."

"In this case, allow me to withdraw to report to my general what took place here."

"Do as you please; I account to nobody but my sovereign the Czar, and take no orders save from him."

The hussar saluted stiffly and took a step toward the door.

"Good speed, officer!" called out Cocagne with a droll grimace.

The cavalier passed him with a furious glance.

"Carry my compliments to the general's lady," went on the irrepressible joker; "if she should be dying for news of her first lover, the student Hermann von Finkinstein, I know somebody who can gratify her."

This phrase, dropped at random, had effect on both the principal hearers, but it was on the officer like a lightning-stroke; he was no longer pale but corpse-like; he reeled on his long legs and had to grasp the door-jamb not to fall.

"How now! do you not believe at present, my prince, that I have found the skeleton in the closet, and that I know a good deal about the gentleman?" rattled on Cocagne with a triumphant wink.

"This is a lie!" stammered the hussar.

"What? I never said anything!" chuckled the boy; "it is rather too soon to turn green as a lizard before I say a single word of my little novelette."

"I am bound to say," said the Russian, observing the scene with sarcastic curiosity, "that by merely watching you, one is tempted to believe you are guilty of some atrocity."

But the hussar had managed to recover some self-possession. He returned to the middle of the room and stared the denouncer in the face without brow-beating him.

"Your highness should grant," he said with assumed disdain, "that it requires an effort to remain calm when one hears such insolence from a malapert boy, but since you deem the nonsense worth taking seriously, I stay for him to explain. I demand that."

"Come, speak little drummer, since the gentleman really wants to hear what you have to tell us," commanded the prince, with somewhat less inattention. "And if that be no inducement, I may add that it will singularly interest me." He sat up, like a magistrate, in his chair.

"I obey your orders, my lord," replied the boy, "and it will not take long, for I have the matter by heart. To begin with, there lived once in Germany

a student by the name of Hermann von Finkinstein, and a pretty girl named Wilhelmina. I remember these names because of the oddity."

The hussar could not conceal a shudder which the improvised judge remarked.

"This commences like the fairy tales, but it does not end like them," went on the boy; "for, instead of getting married and living happily ever afterward, the two sweethearts agreed to part, and each go his own way. Hermann became a soldier, and Wilhelmina also *went for a soldier*—I ought to say, an officer, for she captured and wedded a general. Naturally, the husband had an aide-de-camp who obeyed the lady in all things as faithfully as the general, or a shade more so—he is not particular to a shade. One day, or night, for it was going on seven P. M., the lady told the aide, who answers to the name of Otto Minden, that she was tired of her first lover. You can easily understand that it is a first-class thorn in the side of a woman who has jilted a man, to see the military service place him at her own door as sentinel? a rejected swain within range of the loaded gun in his hand—ugh! I sympathize with her in her cold shivers. Thereupon, the aide, who can not refuse that lady anything, walks the private out into the woods and fires a pistol ball into him at point blank."

"You lie—you lie!" roared the hussar, foaming with ire.

"The prisoner at the bar must not insult the witness on the stand!" replied Cocagne, with the pon-

derous accent of an offended court usher. "It appears that this sort of thing may go on in a Prussian camp. The sure thing is," went on the lad without any emotion, "that the officer walked back into camp all alone with the story to tell at the bivouac that the private had been bowled over by a stray French picket's bullet. The general and his wife did not ask for further particulars; the story of the dead Hermann passed like a feather down the wind, and for the time it really seemed that the drummer Auguste Cocagne was the sole one who carried the key to Bluebeard's cupboard. Now, your highness has it," concluded the boy, making the military salute to the prince.

The accused ground his teeth, and made a strong effort to speak, but the words seemed to stick in his throat.

"I believe your name is Otto Minden?" questioned the Russ, after a pause.

"That is indeed my name," replied the officer; "and really it is I at whom this little fiend dares to cast a crime from which I blush to justify myself."

"You will look the better for blushing, for your usual complexion is ashen grey," interpolated Cocagne.

"The occurrence which serves as pretext for an absurd slander, has been placed in the military records," replied the cavalry officer, master anew of himself; "and I shall not stoop to ask this fellow for proofs, although—"

"Hold on: I have some proofs, and a witness

into the bargain." said the drummer; "it is an officer of our dragoon, Cornet Boissier."

"That is not true! no French officer was in Soulaines wood," ejaculated the hussar, carried out of his prudence by his irritation.

"Who can tell, though that might not be down in your military daybook," mockingly said Cocagne, "would you like him to be sent for?"

"That reminds me, where is my dear Albert?" asked Prince Zodreff.

"The governor of the town has him in his keeping, along with my cousin."

"What cousin, little drummer?"

"A pretty girl whom you may have seen alongside Mdlle de Saintclair and the countess in the party the other night. The cornet told you her name was Therese Lecomte; Lecomte is my uncle."

"Stop! I remember as a foil to the fair Cecile—a fine, dark girl, who resembles a golden-bronze statue of Liberty?"

"Never having seen the goddess mentioned, I cannot swear to that, but I dare say that's the one. This gentleman in red also thought the girl to his fancy or rather the general's wife, for he stole her away from her father's house, which, to prevent her feeling homesickness, he burnt over our heads. It pleases the dear Wilhelmina to keep her in her service as she likes French waiting-maids."

The prince finished his *kummel* and appeared to reflect. The hussar darted spiteful glances at the accuser.

"Captain Minden," said Boris at last, "in the first place I am going to keep this little drummer as a witness in case you persist in your reprisal upon him for his denunciation. This latter case must be laid before the authorities when the war is over, and you may depend that I shall not let it drop as I recall that I am in a measure allied to the family of Finkenstein. At present, if you wish your reparation to be taken into consideration, bring me the dragoon cornet and this peasant girl pressed into service as an Abigail. I await your reply, M. Minden."

"I yield, my lord, since I see you are under an impression which I trust to dispel in time. Meanwhile," continued the hussar, with a great change of tone, "I should be sorry to deprive your highness of *his buffoon*. As for the French officer whom you desire me to find, I can only promise——"

"Find him, sir!" interrupted the prince curtly; "his head may answer for yours. You have ample time, as our army does not leave the town until to-morrow morning."

"I suggest that he is with the fat governor, you know," said Cocagne, obligingly.

"I shall endeavor to carry out your highness' wishes," returned the officer, apparently as obsequious now as he had been overbearing.

He went out with a very low bow.

"Faugh! what a dreadful blackguard!" said the Russ, when alone with the boy.

"I have never seen many of his sort," said the latter, quietly; "but if he will return me my cornet,

my uncle and Therese, he may go and get hanged where he likes, for I shall not detain him."

"If ever he steps on Russian territory," remarked the prince, "I will call him to account for murdering my distant relative; and, in fact, I do not know that the matter of the ground is of importance. It will be a pleasure to chastise him on any grounds."

Cocagne deigned to approve of the quip, like one who made them of good quality himself.

An infernal uproar in the street broke in upon their laughter. There were shouts and shots, of which one shivered a looking-glass in the room and glanced about the room.

"They are all going mad to-night; or is that a complimentary card from our scarlet officer?" said Cocagne, without wincing. "He might have collected a file of Prussians or a squad of his horsemen to exterminate the witness to his crime."

The supposition had so much probability that the prince, shaking off his coldness, called for his sword.

"What a nuisance it is that I cannot finish my liquor in peace," sighed he.

Hurried steps were heard on the stairs, and a man burst into the room. The door had knocked over Cocagne, who was going to see the reason for the tumult. But both he and the Russian drew back from an offensive attitude on recognizing Albert Boissier. He was pale and out of breath, with his clothes torn, his hair floating in the air and his sword unsheathed. With the yelling and the firearms

resounding in the street behind him, this unannounced entry had the appearance of a scene from a massacre such as Saint Bartholomew's day.

'They are after me— help me to defend!' gasped he, setting his back to the door, turning to face the doorway.

"Don't be afraid, lieutenant, we are on hand," said the little drummer, holding himself in the position of French wrestlers called the "low guard. "I did not know it was you and I was going to throw you, but I promise you that the first who bounces in here will go down from the gallery to the parquet without having to change his ticket."

"I am with you, dear Albert," added the prince, tranquilly, as he came forward with sword and pistol.

The two soldiers who were packing up the furs and clothing, had stood up and took their muskets at a sign from the colonel, while the Cossack porter placed himself across the threshold, with the Russian servant's passive and devoted courage.

The assailants mounted the stairs tumultuously and vociferated as they reached the landing, where, like a human cyclone, they almost threw down the son of the Don, who opposed his broad breast.

"Stand back, Ivan," said the prince, moving the giant aside with a wave of his white hand, and alone facing the intruders. He was clad in a splendid uniform, blazing with medals and stars, and they, and the bullion epaulets, had more effect than the Cossack's colossal stature, Boissier's saber, or Co-

cagne's secret wrestling trick. The hurricane stopped, wavered, recoiled and finally retreated down stairs. To complete the rout, the prince did not disdain to hurl some rebukes at them, with such energetic gestures that the stairs were soon clear of the brawlers.

"Close the door, little drummer," said Boris; "if they annoy us again, Ivan shall pitchfork them out of doors with his lance. And now, dear fellow, sit down, calm yourself and relate something of this scene from the Sicilian Vespers. Upon my word, you reminded me just now of our Czar Peter, pursued by the Strelitz."

"It would take too long, and time is precious," said the cornet, as agitated as the host was calm. "As briefly as I can put it, I have narrowly escaped those straggling soldiers, whom a scoundrel gathered to set upon me, and I beg your protection, not so much for myself, as for a French girl, whom these villains abducted and wish to regain the possession of."

"I guess—the one who looks like a statue of Liberty," said Zodreff, who added, because his hearer did not appear to understand: "Ay, the magnificent brunette, who struck me, at the Countess de Muire's, as a Greek image among the curiosities of a classical collector. I know the whole story, as the little drummer narrated it to me, the lovely goddess being his cousin. My sincere compliments to you—she was a delicious foil to Cecile de Saintclair, and you may rely on me to help you release your fellow-countrywoman from their claws."

"Prince," remonstrated the lover, shocked by the somewhat light tone, "I vow that the girl interests me solely for her misfortunes—I have scarcely spoken to her twice, and—"

"Much may be said in two interviews between young and ardent spirits. I have only seen Mlle. de Saintclair a couple of times, but the heart of your friend is already hers. But, without saying anything of the good turn you can do me with regard to the young lady, who is your kinswoman—what can I do for you and the beautiful brunette?"

"Things stand thus, prince," went on Boissier, who had recovered the mastery of his emotion. The French vanguard is under Troyes, and your army has already begun the evacuation."

"That is no news," returned the Russ, "for the wild fellows killed my best charger this evening, and you see that I am packing my trunks to depart."

"Therese, I mean Cocagne's cousin, is a prisoner," continued Boissier, flushing on the cheeks. "I have helped to deliver her, but she is still within the walls here, while the scoundrel who parted us may again assail her."

"Do you allude to the tow-headed hussar in scarlet, the assassin of Von Finkinstein?"

"Do you know him?"

"I am bound to do so, as your Hermann is a connection of my family. As for Captain Minden, he was leaving here when he must have come in contact with you in the street."

"But who could have told you—"

"The little drummer—the little drummer who is at the bottom of all the mischief going on. This boy is a treasure," added the boyar, laughing heartily, while Cocagne modestly smiled.

"Well, if you know what the villain is, you will judge what he is apt to do," resumed Albert hotly.

"Entirely; and I regret that I let him go when I might have executed him. I had but to nod to Ivan and he would have delighted to show him how far a Cossack lance can go at one thrust."

"That is not how the villain should die," interposed Boissier, "and I have vowed to pursue him until he receives his due punishment. That is why I am here to ask you to take me with you."

The prince had suddenly become serious and he meditated.

"My dear Albert," he said after some silence, "I should feel the greatest pleasure in finishing the campaign in your company, and when peace is proclaimed, I expect to have the joy of your society on my estates in Orenberg; but at present we are both soldiers, and I am too fond of you to want to thwart your career."

"But I am a prisoner of war," observed the dragoon.

"You know better," said the Russ, gently. "You must not forget that I explained your situation to the Czar, and our Alexander Paulovitz decided that the French officer who saved the life of his aid, Boris Zodreff, was free. You remained here because you do not know where to join your corps—perhaps,

I beg to believe, on account of the attractions of this Mdlle. Therese, much the same as I have dallied in the town comprising Mdlle. de Saintclair, between ourselves."

Boissier felt how right the speaker was, and he bowed without replying. The silence grew embarrassing, when Cocagne struck in with remarkable appositeness.

"I hope the company will excuse me," said he, making a leg in old-fashioned courtesy, "but I am thinking that I see how to fix things."

"Listen to the little drummer," said Zodreff; "out of the mouths of babes cometh truth."

"To my mind, here is the right way of it," continued the lad. "It worries the lieutenant to leave my cousin Therese and my good uncle Jacques in the grip of the Germans, to say nothing of the Red Hussar likely to escape the gallows, while the other ladies, in whose society I had the honor to pass some time this evening, are likely to be ruffled if the boys get into the town pretty soon. On the other hand, the Little Corporal never jokes, and Captain Champoreau is no more tender in discipline; they will both want to know what kept an officer of the Seventh Dragoons from his post, and there will be trouble after the campaign. But there is to the front one insignificant lump of mortality, known as Auguste Cocagne, who does not bear a rank, and his absence will not be mourned anywhere unless in the Ninth Foot. Now, the aforesaid Auguste charges himself with looking after his kinsfolk, and working

the oracle to say a good word for the old frump and her blue-eyed beauty of a niece, while he also keeps an eye on the Red Hussar—without including that he hopes to amuse the prince in the meanwhile.”

“Bravo, little drummer, bravo!” exclaimed the prince, delighted by at least two items in the program.

“Up to the coming into town of the boys, the prince and I will shield you all, including your brother officer Panardel, who is at present in the house of one Potard, a grocer in the Bishop’s Square, with the ladies aforementioned. To-morrow they will all be hauled up before our Provost Marshal, with their cavalier, an old foppish nobleman.”

“He is sound on the question,” said the prince; “neither I nor Mdle. de Saintclair will pardon you if you abandon her to the vengeance of the Bonapartists.”

“I will stay and guard the ladies,” said Boissier in a tone of resignation contrasting with the Russian’s merry air.

“That is very fine of you,” said the latter, heartily holding out his hand. “Now that you have decided on the proper thing, know that I have made up my mind to be the death of that horrid lath in scarlet, your rascally hussar, in exchange for which paltry service, do me the great one—promise that, when I am married and settled, we shall meet again—whether at Paris or St. Petersburg, little matters? I own that I would rather the happy meeting should be in the Palais Royal galleries, but it looks

as though your army would prevent our getting there, and if we have to cross the Rhine, I want your pledge to come and see me on the banks of the Neva. Hang it all—we who gave your father hospitality, have some claim to be the host of his son. Needless to say that this invitation includes the future Madame Boisser.”

“I can hardly engage the lady, as I have not the assurance which you seem to possess as regards Mdlle. de Saintclair,” returned the cornet, with some lightness, “but here is my promise. My Paris address is at my uncle the banker’s, rue Mont Blanc.”

“I will send Cocagne to you, if I do not bring him with me,” continued the prince smiling. “Now it is time you went to your duty; if I am taken prisoner, I can do little for your goddess of Liberty. May we meet soon again, and do not forget that I have your promise.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE CANTINEER OF THE IRREGULARS.

Two days following, the streets of Troyes had changed in aspect. The soldiers of the Coalition were displaced by the native forces, and at every corner were the conscripts, the townsfolk and the peasants, who had taken up their old fowling pieces and set scythe-blades on poles to have a blow at the invaders; these, perhaps displayed most courage of all as they were shot when taken, without delay, as they were considered mere marauders by the foreign armies.

All wore a gala air, and on the promenade illumined by a clear winter's sunshine, the citizens stared curiously at the warworn coats yet to be sung by Beranger. Above all the uniforms of the Old Guard attracted attention; but the Imperial bodyguardsmen and the dragoons who had served in the Peninsula had their share in the applause. Not to be scorned was a regiment of woodsmen and farmers, men of size and tireless step, dressed with slight uniformity, whom Lecomte had assembled; thanks to his popularity in Champagne, and whom the Emperor, appreciating the services of his guide, had furnished with arms and appurtenances. The fair sex gave their votes to the stylish horsemen who wore so jauntily the laced and high colored coats

and brilliant accoutrements, while the knowing ones preferred the bronzed features and gaunt but military frames of the soldiery who had been fighting for the last seven years beyond the Pyrenees; it was these veterans, rather than the dandy cavaliers, who fraternized with the farmers, and they might be seen most often at the café tables together sharing the wine.

Apart from the variegated mob, before a humble drinking-stand, with its table stood out at the end of the public walk, two officers were quietly discussing a bottle of brandy. Both wore the famous green coat of the dragoons lately in Spain, but they differed markedly in age, bearing and grade. The thin epaulet of the cornet on the younger rubbed the heavy gold insignia of the elder, but the latter chatted with perfect equality with his inferior. The passers-by who might be astonished at such unusual familiarity among officers of unlike degree, would have been less affected if they had known the two dragoons' previous relations.

One was our old friend Champoreau, recently promoted to be colonel, and the brave soldier still preferred the company of his pupil Boissier to that of the old commanders of his regiment. Since the army occupied Troyes the two friends had not left one another, and the colonel on this day, retained by duty in the morning, had hastened to find his cornet at the tryst he had made.

After the hurried departure of Prince Zodreff, Albert had not forgotten what he ought to do.

Calling on the countess' in the morning, he was told that she and her niece had gone out without saying when their return might be. Inquiring quietly of people in the street, he learnt where Potard's was located, and asked tidings of his relative there. The grocer swore by all that was holy that he was ignorant of the ladies' whereabouts, from suspecting the officer or under some error, and Boissier was left to believe that they had left the town with the enemy. He was not sorry, as his own position was not strong enough for him to do much to protect the turncoats and royalists. Troyes had risen against the nobles who had left France when the great revolution deprived them of their estates, who had lived abroad during all the country's troubles, but who now flocked back for a share in the spoils. The mob trampled the white cockade under foot after tearing it from the brow where it was still imprudently worn. The bearers of the royal emblem were now denounced and a military commission was convoked. Albert shuddered to think that in a day it might send to execution those who had been his hosts, though he was an officer of the French army.

On the other hand, his search for Therese had proved fruitless; some hinted that the Prussians had taken certain prisoners with them, in spite of their hate, and others suggested that she had gone with her father, who had returned to his village on a special mission from headquarters.

"We are not going to rust here," observed Colonel Champoreau. "The orders are out for us to evacu-

ate the town in a day or two—say the 26th of February—we are to cross the Aube at Arcis, and we may have another brush with the old boar Blucher in the Marne. It will please me, as my hand itches to swing the sword again.”

“I thought you had enough of it at Montereau, where you are said to have been busy,” said Boissier, unable to keep back a smile; “for friends have been telling me that you broke up three squares with our first squadron.”

“Oh, the boys behaved fairly there,” replied the colonel, curling his moustache; “that made them remember that I had been through nineteen campaigns and was wounded half-a-dozen times—and won me the colonelcy.”

“To the applause of all the regiment.”

“I don’t deny it; yet I would rather have waited another month for the honor rather than go through the hateful duty now imposed upon me. They had the silly notion to make me presiding officer of a military tribunal, and I have just come from lolling in an arm-chair to hear a pack of lawyers yelping.”

“Deserters, I suppose, of whom it was necessary to make an example?” hinted Boissier, with growing emotion.

“Better than that—a man of title—a marquis, who had donned the white cockade, and besought the emperors and kings to come and swallow France. They chose me, an old soldier, to try these banished nobles. They must be out of their senses at headquarters.”

"How did the case terminate?" inquired Albert timidly.

"How could it end but one way? Of course the noble was doomed to death; that is the regular penalty in the articles of war. The case was clear as spring-water, and the poor wearer of the white cockade, who did not show the white feather, will be shot to-morrow. I have no weakness for these renegades, Albert, but it hurt me to deal out such judgment on an old silly in white hair and old-fashioned clothes."

"What was his name?" Boissier almost trembled as he put the question, but he breathed again when Champoreau answered carelessly: "A Marquis de Gonault," whom the youth did not remember as a guest at the Countess de Muire's.

Unfortunately the colonel almost instantly added: "The worst of it that I am not through yet, and I must carry on this butcher's trade to-morrow. It appears that there is a quantity of these runagates here who welcomed the enemy. Denunciations of them shower down and I hear that a whole covey of them will be snared this very night, including a countess who was the maddest of the band against our side. If they bring women up before me, dash me if I will not get myself put on the sick-list and turn the ugly work over to another."

"But they may fail to arrest them," said Boissier, "and as we shall be going presently—"

"By Jove! you are right, and I do not envy anybody who presides at the other hearings, for I have

no inclination to play the magistrate. But, I say, boy, it seems to me that the ladies of Troyes have devilish good taste, for there is one hovering round us very persistently."

The day was drawing in, and the loungers were growing less in number. A woman in a somewhat novel attire which had a touch of masculinity about it, was certainly hanging round the end of the way, where the two officers were seated, and every time she passed, she slackened her steps as if to study them narrowly. This movement had been noticed by the cornet, but as his heart was fully monopolized, he hesitated to believe that he, rather than the new colonel, was the object.

Judging by her step, the woman was young and certainly alert and graceful; her figure was concealed by her very long and full cloak, but in passing another stroller, it had been drawn aside and showed a small waist in a leather belt with a metal clasp of military aspect. It was hard to get a good view of her face, as she kept toward the officers that side on which was slouched a round, dark green felt hat, with ribbons of the same color; this was worn over a lace cap with strings of a countrified pattern which Albert remembered as common in Champagne. At the hem of the mantle appeared a sort of loose pantaloon of red, with white gaiters and a neat boot. It seemed to him, too, when the cloak was drawn back, that he had a glimpse of a small brass-hooped cask, suspended at the side by a shoulder-belt of buff leather. In short, it was the

equipment of a canteen woman, but none of these, usually old soldier's widows, had this pretty and elegant air. The cockade was new to him, being a sort of rosette of blue edged with red, coquettishly relieving her jet black curls, and secured by a pin having the imperial bee for its head.

"To my thinking, I had better leave you on sentry duty alone," suggested Champoreau, laughing.

"But I protest to you, colonel—"

"Never mind, my boy; that lightsome vivandiere does not want to talk nonsense with an iron-gray trooper like me; so I leave you to learn her errand, and I expect you about nine at the Military Cafe."

Without waiting for a reply, Champoreau arose and went away at a quick step. Scarcely had he turned the corner, before the unknown cantineer quickly came up to the cornet and in a moved voice, said:

"Come!"

The side face was still presented, which was screened by the hat, but he had recognized the voice, and while puzzled at the attire, he had no hesitation in following her into the darkest and most deserted part of the lounging ground. The long alley of young elms ended here at an iron openwork gate seldom used. The strollers preferred the side toward the town and this led to a poor suburb. But the guide proceeded into a street bordered by low, small buildings, and utterly without lamps.

Soon the miserable street took a turn, and at the elbow was a place propitious for a conference. In



"YES, IT IS I," MUTTERED THE GIRL.

the corner of a house at the angle was hollowed out a niche in which was stood a statue of the Madonna, while following a custom borrowed from southern countries, a lamp had been placed at the feet of the image. Its light was some compensation for the total absence of any from the street lamps. The pilot stopped in its full glare, and if he had any doubts, they would have been dispelled by this action, altogether opposed to the proceeding of evil doers. He stepped forward with no farther hesitation.

"Therese!" he exclaimed, as the face was presented to view on the side uncovered by the hat, and he hastened to repair the outcry of such little respect by adding: "Mdlle. Lecomte—here—thus attired?"

"Yes, it is I," muttered the girl, more tremulously that one of her robust frame had need to speak. "What I have had to do should denote that it is an affair of life or death."

"Your father?"

"No, my father is alive and well, and now closeted with the Emperor to have special instructions for the regiment he has raised of irregulars, who are, with life in their hand, to harass the invader as only the country-bred can do. I march with them," she said with more pride than confusion, "with my neighbors and kinsfolk; none would stay at home when they heard that I was going with my father. But I must not say more about us. Our peril is in the partisan strife, and not immediate. I come to

plead the cause of those whom only you can save, as you saved my father and cousin."

"I cannot think to whom you allude, but speak, mademoiselle."

"When I was kept in the service of that German lady, the first kind words that I met were at the house of the Countess de Muire, who, with her niece opposed the tyranny of my enforced mistress. They insisted that I should not be a menial, and farther allowed me to move into their parlor in a garb and with a freedom which made me not ashamed to face you and your friend."

"My friend?"

"That Russian prince whose cause is also at stake. In a word, they will capture Madame de Muire, her niece and the old gentleman who ventured back from exile; the Vidame de Branscourt, this night, unless you come between or find a safer refuge."

"A refuge, you say? I thought that my relatives were in safety?"

"An old tradesman who serves the family gave them shelter, but he is suspected of harboring the wrong opinions. He is watched and the spies could often go into his dwelling as it is over his store."

"You must mean Potard? But when I asked news of him, he must have put me off with a falsehood."

"He was probably enjoined to tell nothing to anybody."

"And he strikes me as not being very keen-witted."

"At all events, your aunt has all confidence in him. He is in a sad way, because they have been betrayed while beneath his roof."

"Betrayed? Who could have committed this shameful deed?"

"I do not know. They do not know, for they would have told me, since I have the confidence of Mdlle. de Saintclair," she added with fervency: "it is thus that I am aware of the secret of her heart—she loves the Russian, and it is the loss of her hope to wed him that preys on her heart. You must know what fate awaits them if they are not promptly taken from the house in the Bishop's Square. If you should be unable to help them—listen! I will tell my father; he hates these renegades, but he will bend to my prayers. With a few men we can extricate the poor ladies and the noble from the house under pretense we are arresting them, and remove them into the country."

Albert was reflecting on the gravity and imminence of the danger.

"Nay, nay, this will never do. It will wreck your father's standing as regards the Emperor, who would be slow to overlook such an infraction, and such a fraud by the troops he licensed. Is this house of Potard's so watched that nobody can leave it unseen?" he asked.

"Not an hour ago, for Mdlle. de Saintclair, watching at an upper window, was able to signal to me and call me in. I left it, too, yet I have not been followed. See, the coast is clear as far as eye can reach."

"And you had no fear in venturing alone in these streets where such a miscellaneous gathering are roaming?"

"I am armed, and I hope with the soldier's garb I have put on some of the martial spirit," she said with a simple gravity which invigorated him.

"Enough," he said, with impatience at having delayed so long. "You are not mistaken in me; I will give my position—my life—my all to fulfill a wish of yours; and in this case I am bound to assist my own blood, and the beloved of a dear friend."

Nevertheless, for all his enthusiastic acquiescence, Albert found himself in a quandary. Admitting that the fugitives might be led out of Potard's house without obstacle, the hardest part of the task would have yet to be accomplished. Where could he bestow an elderly lady, a young girl and an old gentleman? The cornet saw no solution to such a problem, and he could not help shuddering if not shrinking at the responsibility thrust upon him. Still, if Therese took such an affair upon her hands, and they were no relatives of hers, while to foster the love of another was very romantic grounds for her to act in Celine's behalf, it ill became him to hold aloof. He hoped that on the road some happy plan would spring into his mind.

"Come, mademoiselle," he said with a tone more resolute than was his heart.

And with a step almost as martial as his own, while not less firm, the cantineer of Lecomte's Rural

Defenders marched by his side. They had not thus kept pace many minutes before the man abruptly exclaimed:

“I have it!”

“What?” said Therese, starting with emotion, for her heart had felt the warmer and throbbed the faster for such companionship.

“The shelter for my friends. They shall dwell in the residence of the presiding officer of the military court which would have to try them on the morrow !”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BETRAYER.

The young soldier had a very good and at the same time a very plain idea, as most good ones are. Salvation lay in gaining time. It is true the plan presented some rather great difficulties in execution. It is only in a large city that one may hide, and Troyes was far from offering the resources for that purpose of a metropolis at this period. Nearly every one knew his neighbor's business, often better than his own. Never had they a finer occasion to pry and listen, and this occupation, so dear to the country people, had developed greatly since the war.

As always happens in political crises, or social ones, the inhabitants were divided into two camps, and the triumphant side had no more eager care than to run down the opposition. For the time, the royalists were down, and many over-zealous patriots deemed it their duty to persecute them to the uttermost. No doubt it would have been worthier to confine themselves to defending the endangered land; but, after all, public sentiment condemned those who had greeted the foreign foe, and none durst struggle against the current of national opinion.

Boissier was as little inclined to it as any one, but he did not believe he was betraying the country in saving an old man and woman, while his sympathy

was all for the girl who was beloved by his Russian friend. The confidence in him, which the latter had shown while recommending his loved one, had its part in making him embrace the project brought by Therese. He knew one man who had a tender heart like himself on this point—Colonel Champoreau. The latter had sharply outspoken his repugnance for the dread functions which were charged on him, and the youth might rely upon his concurrence. The old dragoon would rather ride upon four-deep of bayonets than preside over the court-martial appointed to condemn fellow-countrymen who had gone politically astray.

“Without prisoners there can be no trial,” the cornet thought; “and they will not look for them under the roof of the president of the court.”

So he had planned to make that domicile the place of refuge, by lodging them there, without consulting the colonel.

He could the more smoothly make this removal as the latter shared with him the rooms left vacant by Prince Zodreff.

Introduced, thanks to Therese who had the password, into the presence of his relatives, he was hailed as a liberator. For the circumstances, his proud aunt had laid aside her killing mien, and merely blamed the manner of her niece in suing, through almost a stranger, whom she called in off the street, for a protector. The plan proposed by the dragoon officer was at once debated.

The refugees’ predicament was most strained.

Spied on all sides, poor Potard dared no longer go out even to buy provisions, and the nobles had to stoop to living on the eatables in the store. Panardel had eloped on the first day of short rations, and, in spite of the handsome promises he had made to deliver the rest, had sent no news about himself.

The place was no longer tenable, and the threat of immediate arrest was constant; the loyal opinions of the unfortunate tradesman had pointed him out for the watchfulness of the oppositionists, and suspicious persons were noticed wandering round.

Despite the imminence of the peril, Madame de Muire showed lukewarmness toward the officer's proposition. In her head, filled with superannuated prejudices, she could not hold the idea of begging for a haven of a revolutionary soldier.

To make the intractable dame decide, the energetic intervention of her old friend the Vidame was requisite. Having once been an officer in the royalist army of Conde, the old noble had a weakness for soldiers, and he willingly acknowledged the bravery of the swordsmen who served "the little Corsican gentleman," called by him, "Buonaparte." This was the solitary concession he would make to modern ideas, as a representative of the past; but he found arguments which impressed the countess.

"My fair friend," he said, in a peremptory voice, "the profession of arms ennobles, and you may see that by your relative, who was the father of this worthy young officer. This friend of his, Champor-eau, bears a queer name, but he also wears the

epaulet and I do not believe he would betray us."

Cecile supported the plea with eloquent looks and Albert was given his own way on his answering for the colonel as for himself.

It was settled that the grocer, who was not directly concerned, should stay to bar the pursuit of inquiring persons, and the little party quitted the hospitable house for a safer one, under the dragoon's escort. Through unlooked-for luck, the journey was effected without mishap, and the fugitives met nobody whatever. To avoid attention, they were divided into couples, Albert opening the march with the young lady, the countess and her chevalier following at a distance, the old lady on the beau's decrepit arm. As a rearguard, the cantineer closed in the march, and the eyes of the cornet too often wandered in that direction for him not to endanger the general safety by the neglect of reconnoitring before him. Lees enwrapped in her own thoughts about the absent one, who was with the hostile army, Cecile might have been irritated by the inattention of her immediate cavalier, but she made no rebuke during the adventure. The entrance of the proscribed ones into the new abode was effected as happily.

The rooms were empty and Albert had the key, so that he could install the three in the suit lately occupied by Prince Zodreff. That noble had left traces of his occupation in empty bottles and odd boots trimmed with fur. Informed of the rank of the previous tenant, the countess believed the acci-

dent of good omen. Her aristocratic mind may have counterbalanced with the influence of the imperial aid—the republican soldiers.

Seeking more substantial surety, Albert went out in quest of Champoreau. Seven o'clock was striking, and the new colonel ought to be at the officers' principal resort. He held a congress of his disciples and cronies there nightly, to recite his deeds in Spain. Boissier had no trouble to discover him, but there was much in opening to him the budget of his confidence.

Still it was urgent to let the master of the rooms know what was going on in them; though perfectly sure of Champoreau's uprightness, the cornet was not without uneasiness about the way in which he would receive the news of his floor being taken by storm. Tormented with this fear, he crossed the threshold of the drinking establishment where military customers were at present in the majority.

The smoke and the crowd were dense; the clinking of glasses set empty on the tables; the sharp click of dominoes played on the marble slabs, or of dice thrown on the boards, rose like notes detached on the base of the conversation. Albert was not long before recognizing the sonorous accents of the colonel, soaring over the uproar like a heavy piece of artillery above the fusillade.

To all appearance the officer was orating upon some subject full of interest, for none of his hearers interrupted him.

At times a few approving words were squeaked

out by a shrill organ, which Albert believed he had also heard before.

It seemed a badly chosen moment to interrupt the orator in full flow, but the case was grave and time so precious that the youth did violence to his timidity. The pipes were so busily at work that he had some trouble to discern the colonel. But he was guided by the ringing voice, and he plunged into the clouds and reached a group around the stove.

His appearance was hailed with kindly outcries.

"Here's my own cornet; a son of the brave; a relict of the Russian campaign!" roared Champoreau joyfully. "Room, gentlemen, by the fire and the light for the best recruit that the Seventh has had since the campaign opened; bar none."

Albert saluted all the company, but he did not take a seat, as he wanted to be free in his movements to get away and take the colonel with him. While he was seeking for an excuse to interrupt his superior's flow of eloquence, he felt somebody pluck his sleeve.

"How do you do, comrade?" trilled a shrill voice, the same he had already heard.

Turning and looking he perceived with stupefaction the face of Panardel, whiter than usual. This sorry cavalier was seated astride of a chair with the back before him, with the victorious bearing of a veteran. He had cocked his shako on one side of his head and stuck a huge cigar in his mouth; but these braggart graces only augmented the ridiculous impression he naturally created. Perhaps tobacco

had not exhilarated him, for he looked very odd with pinched nose and discolored lips. His presence seemed inexplicable to the new-comer; so much so that he almost forgot the aim of his visit, to question this deserter from Potard's house; but it was no time for such inquiry, and he merely replied coldly to the greeting. The captain, who did not bear malice, tried to lighten the cloud which he noticed.

"Come, Boissier, as you are a pattern for the service," he said, twisting his moustache, "what do you think of a cornet who lets fine ladies abduct him and keep him so close that he cannot answer the roll-call for three days?"

"Why, captain, I do not understand, why I——"

"Oh, don't catch fire so quickly! We are not talking about you, but your brother-officer, Panardel, here, who wants to make us believe that the ladies of Troyes leagued themselves to prevent him rejoining his colors."

"Really," sneered Albert, covering the hussar with a scathing look.

"Just so, and he asserts that these sirens wanted to induce him to desert altogether. Upon my word of honor, if I were to listen to him he would betray the house where these conspirators entrapped him."

"Until I hear even farther proof, I shall never believe that one of our officers is capable of such an infamous deed," hissed Albert between his clenched teeth.

"Nay," faltered the lady-killer, "the colonel has

missed my meaning, and I vow that my intention never was to——”

“I do not busy myself about your intentions, broke in Boissier disdainfully, “no more than your connections in Troyes; but I introduced you into the family of a relative of mine, and if your story has any allusion—even indirect, to that lady, I give you a formal contradiction.”

This declaration, as blunt as unexpected, produced a disastrous effect on its object. His mealy complexion went through all the colors of the rainbow, and amid the silence which always follows a violent outburst in polite society, Panardel was heard to utter incoherent apologies. Charmed at heart to see the boaster lashed so sharply, the colonel believed he ought to prevent a quarrel between his good soldier and this bad one.

“Come, come, my dear Boissier,” said he, in a fatherly tone, “save your ire for the enemy, and come and take a lesson in playing billiards.”

He had risen while tendering this pacific advice, which furnished the dragoon with the chance he sought to take him apart.

“Colonel,” said he as soon as he could speak without being overheard, “I want to speak a word to you, outside.”

“Outside?” repeated the officer, who did not long to give up the Capua of the coffee-house: “Why, it is raining. You must have a serious matter to talk about.”

“The lives of three persons are at stake—those

near and I may say dear to me," faltered Albert, in a broken voice.

"Deuce take it! it is another tune you are singing. Left wheel and forward! Whoever heard of an old soldier catching a cold in the head, anyhow?" added the colonel as he proceeded to the doorway.

As soon as they were out in the street, he looked his lieutenant squarely in the face and said in a jesting way:

"I wager that a woman is in the case, and that the young woman in the military garments has a finger in the pie?"

"She did lead me into it, that is true, colonel, but not for the motive you imagine. She came to ask me to save the Countess de Muire and her niece Cecile de Saintclair."

"The names sound high-flavored, but they are not known in the regiment," observed the other, little versed in the peerage of the county.

"That is true; I forgot that; you would not know?" stammered the young man, too perplexed to know how to broach the question.

"Come, my boy," said the old dragoon meekly; "you cannot have brought me out here in bad weather, not fit for a dog, to tell me your love affairs. I shall have a loss of voice to-morrow unless you are going to gallop through your report—and I shall be unable to take the chair at my council of war."

Honest Champoreau involuntarily supplied the other with the channel for change of conversation sought by him, and he plunged into it like a flash.

"It relates to this council of war, colonel. You know that you will have to try each morning the prisoners taken in the night. Have you any idea of the unfortunate creatures who may be dragged before you?"

"May 'Marshal Volwarts' put my dragoons to rout if I have the faintest idea."

"One is an old royalist officer, who is too feeble to fight except with his tongue; wrongheaded only in his opinions in politics; two others are ladies—a relative of mine, whom I call my aunt, the Countess de Muire, and her niece Mdle. de Saintclair, who is loved by my dearest friend—out of our army. I mean," went on Boissier, who felt that he might now express his regard for his instructor.

"Oho! my dear boy; the matters become grave, indeed. Egad; court-martials do not trifle, and however I might wish to save your friends, I would have to sentence them all the same. But is it not the old lady of title at whose residence I called for you the night we went to Montmirail?"

"The same, commander."

"Humph! I saw the old nobleman there, and I heard stuff talked that did not please me. In fact, these courtiers have licked the Czar's boots, and your high and mighty dame strikes me as being a bit treasonable."

"She is of my blood, a friend of my mother when I was a child, and——" Albert broke down with emotion, as childhood's remembrances flowed upon him.

"That is another matter. For an old friend of my mother's I would charge a battery of twelve-pounders. But in the name of all that is vexatious, what does the old cat want to scratch up these muddy holes for?"

"Nobody is more sorry than I, colonel; but the time for crying over spilt milk is past, and if the countess should be arrested this night——"

"Come to the point," interrupted Champoreau, "I am not eager to try the woman, and if your countess is not brought before me in the morning, I shall not run round the town to look for her. Then, as we shall be marching out in a day or two, and we shall not be here again unless the Allies compel the return, she has only to keep under cover this night, and the trick will be played."

"Her hiding-place is known—she has been betrayed and in an hour she will be cast into prison——"

"Betrayed—are there men who betray? If I only knew the rogue who carries on this vile trade, I——"

"You will soon know him, colonel, but it is not that fellow who is now in question," said Boissir, with momentary hesitation about telling Panardel's name.

"I suppose it is so, by Jove, but in any event, a rich old lady has droll tastes to mix up with conspiracies," said the old dragoon. Then, beating his forehead, he exclaimed, "since you are so well versed in the countess' affairs, I suppose that you know where she is lying perdu?"

"I do know, colonel."

"Why don't you go straight and take her to some place where the spies will not find her?"

"I have done so, commandant."

"You have? That's military promptness anyhow, but, then," he said much surprised, "oh, I see—you fear that the place is not quite safe and that the master of the house may sell her—the rascal?"

"That I do not fear, colonel. For the man under whose roof I have placed her is the most worthy and honorable of men."

"But, in short, where is this countess?"

"In your lodgings, dear colonel," replied Albert as calmly as he could speak.

"In my lodgings?" repeated Champoreau, displaying all the signs of the sharpest astonishment.

"Yes, at yours—or ours, if you want me to be very exact," returned the cornet with simplicity. "Have I been wrong in relying on your tender heart, colonel?"

"No, hang it all! my heart is in the right place—but, while I admit that you have acted well enough, you might have consulted me."

"Time was wanting, and, besides, I believed myself so sure——"

"Sure of what?" grumbled the veteran, who failed to give himself a vexed air; "sure that I should not betray them? That was a hard guess to make where I was concerned, I do not think. But don't you run away with the belief that I am going to thank you for having nested those white crows in my rooms. Never! by Jupiter, never, sir!"

"I do not require your thanks, colonel, but your help in saving them."

"Save them—save? This is a pretty state of things. You young officers never doubt a thing—dash ye! You want this villainous crew protected by me—whom the Emperor has appointed president of a council of war to try such turncoat French who fawn on the foreign invader? As well expect a grocer to kick his customers out of the door."

"But colonel, I will take the whole upon my shoulders, if you like. I received them in our rooms, and you can shut your eyes to the reception and housing. Did you not hint something of the kind a while ago? The main thing is to gain time."

Instead of answering, Champoreau stamped, and testily pulled at his moustache. Knowing the value of this latter token, Albert considered it prudent to wait for the end of the storm, and he was right. For want of objections to pulverize, the honest old soldier had to relax gradually.

"You ought to know," he finally said, after silence full of menace, "that your fine lady will be badly housed in bachelor apartments."

"At the present time, the countess does not think of luxuries," replied the officer demurely.

"Maybe so; yet I recall having smoked three pipes in the sitting-room, and that must strike strong on a nose habituated to fancy perfumes—and again, the young lady—where the deuce did you put her, poor girl?"

"Mdlle. de Saintclair stays beside her aunt, col-

onel; she will bless you as her aunt does if you will allow her to stay in your apartments until the danger passes."

"If I allow? I should like to hear how I can do otherwise? You do not imagine that I am going to notify the Provost Marshal where to lay hands on them, do you? But others may betray them. Have you taken any precautions against my orderlies seeing them?"

"Mine has not yet been detached from the squadron, and yours was outdoors when the ladies took possession."

"Humph! he is always out of an evening, to get drunk, too, the brute; but I am not sorry for that, now, though I do mourn for my old Ratibal, who would surely have hit upon some scheme to get us out of the pinch. While we wait for the Germans to turn him over to me, we must shift as we can without him. Come, come, Boissier, keep cool, confound you! and hold your head up! conduct me to the ladies, unless you think they will be frightened by my old moustache."

"Oh, colonel, you never think that! They know all about your kindness to me, for I have kept up a correspondence with the old lady, because of her goodness to me when I came home, parentless, from Russia as my uncle, a man of business, did not want to be bothered by a boy. And Mdlle. de Saintclair is her reader, so that she has seen your name more often as her aunt."

"You sly dog! to take me on the weak flank;

you know that with the reminder of your loss of your father in Russia, you can lead me where you will. To the route, by twos—forward, march! I would not mind going to Siberia, with you.”

“We shall be more warmly received than there.”

In less than a quarter of an hour, the two dragoon officers arrived before the late dwelling of Prince Zodreff. The fugitives awaited with very natural anxiety the return of their friend, and he was hailed by a concert of gratitude.

Boissier had preceded his commander by a little to prepare the way; for at heart he still distrusted his aristocratic relative's prejudices. This foresight assured the self-made colonel of the welcome which he had so many claims to receive. The countess proved kindly, Cecile was affected to tears, and the Vidame was cordial. More could not be expected from old fossils, and all the weight of facts was required to make them bow to being saved by a satrap of the Emperor.

Champoreau received all the courtesies and thanks like one whom external demonstrations little touched. He ruled his bearing on principles strange to social etiquette, and in the present case acted solely to please his favorite, the young cornet. It was vainly that the Vidame tried to draw him into a valuation of the Royal-Cravate Hussars as compared with the Seventh Dragoons, for the colonel disdained his advances, and confined himself to a surly benevolence, which expressed perfectly the state of his feelings.

"I do not know anything about the royal regiments," he said, to cut short the old noble's ramblings, "but I know the orders which regulate the service of the French Cavalry, and I never have read in them that an officer is to act as a policeman. Therefore, it is not I who will come to seek you to place you before the court over which I have the honor to preside, and I go further in answering for it that nobody will come here to disturb you. But you must do me the kindness not to go out until to-morrow evening, as I guarantee nothing outside my house, and this good town of Troyes abounds in spies."

"Be easy on that head, sir," said the countess; "we are too grateful for your hospitality so kindly granted to expose ourselves to any danger."

"Quite right," bluntly added the soldier, "for I should follow my conscience if I had to try you." This outburst cast a cold cloud on the audience, which the honest dragoon tried to moderate by adding, with a gallant intention: "My hope is that the ladies will not find the time hang heavy, as my squadron is ordered on active service two mornings hence, and our friend Boissier will keep you company till we march."

"Going to leave us, colonel?" inquired Cecile, in a timid voice, and raising on him for a moment those blue eyes which had in one glance transfixed the Russian prince's heart.

The old officer was about to reply, and was

brushing up some polite sentences to excuse himself when hurried steps sounded noisily on the stairs.

"What blunderer comes to disturb us?" he muttered to himself. "Boissier, come and help me to entertain him!"

The somewhat alarmed cornet followed his superior out upon the landing, after taking the care to close the door behind them, so that the proscripts were shielded from inquisitive eyes. They arrived just in time to check Panardel on the last step, as he came in breathless haste.

"What in thunder do you want here?" challenged Champoreau, in anything but an encouraging voice.

"Please, colonel," faltered the hussar, trying to catch his breath, "an order was brought you at the café. I thought it must be in haste, and as I knew I would find you at home, I——"

"You knew—how the mischief did you know? I do not like this sort of peeping and prying; do you hear me, cornet?"

"But, colonel, I assure you——"

"Enough! take your confounded assurance to the guard-room for three days. You are under arrest—to teach you to mind your own business! Now, hand over the missive."

Overwhelmed by this reward for his doing a kind act, Agenor held out without a farther word the official despatch, of which the dragoon hastened to snap the seal and break the wrapper.

"A thousand thunders!" he broke forth as soon as his eyes had run over the lines.

"What is it now?" asked the younger officer, with uneasiness.

"We start to-night, dear boy! our brigade is chosen for the vanguard. My orders are to have 'boots and saddle!' sounded at once, and in an hour we will be out of this rat-hole of a town. Thank heaven, no more court business—no more—here, what the deuce are you listening for?" cried Champoreau to Panardel, whom he distrusted by instinct.

"But, colo—"

"Go to your quarters and keep in them till further orders, or by the Lord! I will lug you to them myself and recommend you to your captain. Cornet Boissier, you have twenty minutes to join me in. Put things in order here, lock up and bring me the keys," said the old officer, with a wink to the younger one, as he thrust before him the bewildered Panardel.

Albert understood that this unexpected order signified the safety of his friends. By a surplus of good luck, for three days the dangerous Agenor was put out of the way to work evil. Thus all fell as might be wished. To rush back into the sitting-room, inform the countess of what was going on, and exact the promise that she would not stir out of this inviolable sanctuary until the army departed—this was soon done. He also found time to assure Cecile that, if the fortune of war brought him within hearing of the Russian prince, he would not consider he was a traitor to his cause in telling this enemy and foreigner that he had a loving friend on the French side.

CHAPTER XXII.

“OBEY ORDERS!”

The last day of the last great campaign of Napoleon had arrived. On the thirtieth of March, 1814, after twenty-two years of incredible triumphs, the glorious soldiers who had conquered Europe from the Kremlin to the cathedral of Lisbon, were driven to bay to defend Paris. With olden survivors of the Republican phalanxes, and boys drafted before the right age, they were ranked on the heights protecting the capital to the north. At three o'clock the decisive time came, and the French line receded, though the Allies did not advance from having lost so heavily.

The suburb Belleville held out, and was the key of the position; but now the enemy came upon it, down the slopes on all sides, and would infallibly overpower the remnant of the brave. The last defenders of France knew that they were to perish with her, but not one even looked behind to see if flight were possible.

At the head of the reduced squadron which formed all the cavalry left to the detachment, Colonel Champoreau and Cornet Boissier exchanged sad looks and a few words. They seemed typical of the resistance—the veteran and the Youngest Soldier of the Grande Armée.

Heroism is hereditary, and the youth bore himself, tireless and unflinching like the warrior of a hundred pitched battles. He was determined not to survive the final disaster in preparation for his country and he had renounced all his dreams of love and happiness since he had seen march into the thick of battle the legion, lessened to a couple of companies, of Jacques Lecomte. Accepting the threat of the Allies, that irregulars would be given no quarter, they had replaced their tattered flag with a black banner, and the *vivandiere* who bore it by the side of her father, streaked with blood from wounds of her own, wore the same fixed expression as her sire, of one who had bidden farewell to life. The rustic flageolets which replaced the fifes of the regular drum corps, were playing a country air, more fitted for a dance than a battle, and with this odd memory, he pictured the poor girl surrounded by the savage hordes of Russia and Austria.

At the approach of the supreme hour, he thought of her alone, the patriot who set him an example how to lay his life on the altar of his country. It only cost him a pang to die without saying, "We shall meet again!" to her.

The hosts massed up and rolled toward them, silent and full of threatening.

"In half an hour we shall be environed," he remarked to Champoreau.

"And in an hour, marked 'Dead, Wounded or Missing,'" added the old dragoon, chewing his moustache in rage. "However, I would rather go

down here than see the Germans march under the Arch of the Triumph of the Grande Armée."

The Russian columns had come within grape-shot range, and the eight-gun battery opened fire all together. A hail of iron swept upon the serried body of the assailants, and whose ranks were leveled like growing grain by the wind. But the bleeding furrows filled up, and the speedily re-formed line continued to surge onward.

"What iron men they are," muttered Champoreau; "upon my word, they want twice killing."

Cannonading and musketry roared at the same time on all sides of the tableland, and it was clear that the enemy proposed a general attack. The foot battalions were hurried forward to oppose the Russians with the bayonet, and Champoreau massed his platoon on the road where the ground allowed him to charge.

At this juncture, on the slope of the hill, a hundred paces higher up than the French ranks, appeared a cavalier dashing at the top of speed toward Charenton. He thus had to go around the level land on the incline; bending on the neck of his magnificent grey charger with floating mane and tail, he had to run the gauntlet of the whole of the hostile fire. To judge by his plume and gold epaulets, he was a Russian officer of high rank, and Champoreau, who was an expert in bravery, could not help commenting in an undertone:

"There goes a plucky fellow."

"The grey horse—fire at the grey horse," shouted

the soldiers, as they directed on the intrepid racer a well-sustained fire.

But the Russian seemed to have a talisman against bullets, for he reached the extreme end of the line without being hit.

"That is an order for this general, which is flying past under our nose," grumbled Champoreau.

He spoke too soon, for at the very time he was concluding his sentence, the horse and the rider rolled over one another on the ground.

"Killed two birds with one stone!" gleefully exclaimed the old dragoon.

Both man and beast seemed to have been struck simultaneously, for they formed but one motionless body. They had fallen exactly above the spot where the dragoons were stationed, and out of the route followed by the Russian column advancing upon the battery. On the right the plateau was already won by the Paskievitz Greadiers.

It was the time to enter into the strife and die, and Albert was gathering up the reins to ride in, when Champoreau's hand was laid on his shoulder and his curt voice said:

"Cornet Boissier, dismount, and go and get the dispatches which that officer must be carrying. When you hold them, try to join the marshal, who ought to be at the end of Belleville town, and give them to him."

"But, colonel, you are about to charge, and the squadron—"

"The squadron?" repeated Champoreau in an

overbearing voice, "I do not need you in our ride into death. Obey orders!"

And waving farewell with his hand, the old dragoon collected his men, and flung them with himself upon the van of the Russians. Before Boissier could stir, the whole troop vanished in whirls of smoke.

The young officer understood that Champoreau was trying to save his life by charging him with a duty only less perilous than the desperate charge, but he felt almost humiliated by the favor. But it was too late to bid for that chance of being killed, and besides— "Obey orders," rang in his ears. He resigned himself, left the saddle, and began to descend the hillside. It was slippery and full of impediments, and the officer lay by his horse a gunshot distant.

The cannon thundered no longer, but the fusillade continued, and the bullets whistled on all sides.

Boissier made haste, and was no more than ten paces from the slain steed, when the Russ rose behind the improvised breastwork, although believed dead by Champoreau, with a pistol in each hand.

Albert had all the disadvantages of the situation. He had gone forward without apprehension and precaution, and he faced a living foe instead of a corpse. The man was armed and was shielded by the carcass. The cornet had not yet unsheathed his sword as it would not parry the flying bullets, and his horse, which he led by the bridle, only hampered him. But any idea of fleeing did not come to

him. He knew enough about warfare to feel that to rush at danger was better than to await it.

So, without flinching, he let go the horse, drew his sword, and sprang, with his head down, upon the enemy. In three strides he was upon the obstacle and he was going to strike at random when a burst of merry laughter made him stop and raise his head.

Prince Zodreff was before him, fresh as from a bandbox, cool and gay as when he quitted him at Troyes, a month before.

"Why, it is you, dear friend," said the Muscovite, flinging down the firearms to hold out both hands.

Albert did not reflect, but accepted the grasp tendered him.

There are periods when the strained nerves relax, and young hearts melt in spite of strict reason and inexorable duty. The cornet forgot that he held an enemy at his sword's point to yield to the charm of the unexpected meeting. The warlike instincts of the Latin races are linked with a chivalric, romantic sentiment.

"There cannot be a doubt that I am overwhelmed with good fortune this day," the Russ said, as delighted as the other. "To be peppered by two or three hundred musket-shots and not be hit by one, and to find you alive after such a rough campaign—it is greater joy than I deserve."

"Alive?" echoed Boissier: "I hope I shall not survive this day," groaned the young officer, suddenly remembering that France was in her death-throes.

"What are you talking about, dear fellow?" said the other, with a puzzled air. "Have you the extravagant idea of getting killed here, because Belleville will be taken in an hour's time?"

"Yes, I would rather die than see my country conquered," muttered Albert in a hollow voice.

"That might be heroic in your eyes," tranquilly replied Zodreff, "but it does not seem intelligent to me. Heroism? You, and your army have shown in these two months a sufficiency of it to amaze four generations; but we are ten against one, and the glory is all on your side. It would be foolery for you to die. Besides, I oppose it, and I have a right to do so, as you are my prisoner. If you do not believe me, look!" added the prince, picking up one of his pistols and aiming at the other with comic gravity.

The cornet cast a desperate glance round him. During this short colloquy, the scene of the battle had shifted. The level land surmounting the height was clear. The French battery had vacated the position before superior forces, the infantry had fallen back to the main street of the suburb, and the intrepid horsemen led by Champoreau had disappeared in the smoke. Beneath him, on the plain of Pantin, Albert perceived nothing but the dark, solid masses of the enemy, surging onward for the last assault.

All was over; Paris was taken.

Albert laid his sword across his knee, snapped it, let the halves drop to the ground, and folded his arms with more rage than grief.

"Why break it?" gently inquired Zodreff, "you are well aware that I should never have asked you to deliver it."

The youth quivered with emotion, too powerful for him to utter a single word.

"My dear Albert," continued the boyar, visibly affected also, "only one word farther, and when you have heard me, you are free to act as you please. It is less than two years ago since your countrymen invaded Russia."

The cornet could not help starting with revival of painful memories.

"Moscow was a sacred city to us who also feel patriotism, believe me. When it was occupied, Europe might well believe that the Empire of the Czars no longer existed."

Boissier recalled the feelings that the new Alexander had won the world which actuated his mother in her mad race to be with her husband in the halls of Peter the Great.

"Nevertheless, a new Moscow has risen from those ashes, and to-morrow, pardon me telling you so, our army will parade on your boulevards. Therefore, have faith in the future, and believe that a great nation is never crushed out. For one thing, we do not want France wrecked, for such as I like to visit it once a year." He spoke lightly, but, with true feeling, added: "ever as a friend!"

Boissier was but young, and his sorrow could not stand against such cordiality and sound reasoning.

"I shall be always happy to greet you, prince,"

he said, as once more he wrung the proffered hand. "Ah, if all our enemies were of your pure metal," he sighed, unable to forget all the scenes of the invasion.

"Come, come, I wager that you are thinking of the Austrian hussar. So am I. I have something to tell you about that rascal, in connection with some near to you."

The place was ill chosen for confidential conversation.

"Well," resumed the prince, being probably of that opinion, "we are obliged to quit each other. Night is drawing on, and the fighting is weakening; besides, I do not see why I should not tell you that the message I am carrying probably contains the capitulation of Paris."

Boissier hung his head and turned pale.

"I must see you to-morrow," Zodreff hastened to add, "so let us make an appointment for the evening."

"I will wait for you at my uncle's, the bankers, in the Rue Mont Blanc, where he will be happy to see you. He is a man of millions, and the saying is: 'Rich as a Russian!'—you will agree."

The other ran his hand over his silky moustache without grasping at the invitation.

"My dear Albert," he said, after some hesitation, "I shall be happy to make your relative's acquaintance, but I beg to be excused to-morrow."

Boissier nodded politely in assent.

"I hope you are not going to make fun of me,

but I will risk the truth. I came to Paris in 1807, after the peace of Tilsitt, and I had such a lively winter as I never have enjoyed since. So I made a vow that if ever I were again in your capital, I would spend the first night in the Palais Royal. Ah, you would not know what dreariness is in our northern city!"

Albert shook his head; Russia did not sound sweetly in his ears.

"So, then it is agreed this way—to-morrow, at seven, I shall expect you in the rotunda," he said, joyously.

This appointment for a merry evening, given tranquilly to the accompaniment of distant cannon-ading, so greatly surprised the Frenchman that he could not raise a single objection.

"And now, dear friend, I am going to join our staff, over somewhere by Romainville, and I vow to you that the war is over as far as I am concerned. You can freely enter Paris in this quarter," he subjoined, pointing to a path winding round the hill.

"It is not there that fighting is going on," returned Albert, proudly lifting his head, "and I must join those still defending the outworks."

Without waiting for the prince to try again to turn him from his resolution, the dragoon strode toward Belleville.

"You mad fellow," called out the Russ after him, "mind you keep your appointment to-morrow, anyhow!" And in the hope, no doubt, that he might strike some corresponding chord in the youth, he

shouted: "I am in love with your cousin, and I want to talk the matter over with you."

The Frenchman did not turn his head as he hurried on; already he had forgotten "his friend, the enemy," as before him seemed to rise the stern face of the farmer's daughter. If she lived yet, he was sure of finding her beside her father, where the last handful of defenders were dying in the breach.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ANGEL OF JUSTICE.

The principal promenade of the Parisians in 1814, The Palais Royal, offered a very strange sight on Thursday evening, March the 31st.

At five P. M. on the 30th, the Capitulation of Paris had been signed, and the Allied Sovereigns made their entry next morning. The sacrifice was accomplished: the foreigner strode as a master on the pavement of the city which had laid down the law to Europe during fifteen years. Eager to enjoy the conquest, the strangers spread over the immense metropolis, object of their envy and hate, and at nightfall all around the Palais Royal resembled a bivouac of cavalry. Cossacks and Uhlans, Croats and Hungarians, held their masters' horses before the drinking and supper-saloons. In the arcades, the boyars, in haste to squander the earnings of thousands of serfs, and the Germans, thirsty to taste the light French wines, jostled one another.

The stores blazed with lights; appetizing fumes and Bacchic songs floated out of the half-opened doors of celebrated dining-rooms, and the numbers of the famous gambling saloons showed red on white transparencies over glowing doorways.

The miscellaneous rabble, attracted from all points of the compass, as greedily rushed upon the

feast of pleasures as they had stormed the heights of Belleville.

In the midst of this orgie of nations, Frenchmen were few.

On the threshold of the Lamblin Coffee-house, then frequented by military officers, several gloomy faces might be seen, wearing long, full-skirted coats of a soldierly cut, and carrying club-headed canes; these last representatives of the defeated army looked, with dull and threatening eyes, on the rejoicings of the vanquishers. They were few in number, as the Convention concluded with the Marshals had excluded the troops from Paris; but their condensed choler could be read, and so burning a desire for reprisal that the least accident might bring on a sanguinary riot.

Chief in the hostile group, might be remarked Champoreau by his high figure and broad shoulders. He had tried to throw away his life on the previous day without avail. Ten times he had charged, almost singly, into the dense masses of the infantry, but death had evaded him after defiance for twenty years. After defending Paris in the streets, on foot, with a musket, to the last paving stone of the suburb, he had entered the city when night ended the combat. Mad with rage, his breastplate hewn off, his clothes in strips, his face blackened with powder, he had found shelter at the house of a retired officer. There he assumed the civilian's garb worn in his few stays in town, and he had passed the day fretting without his old companion-in-arms

being able to comfort him. Unable to stay in doors any longer, Champoreau had gone out at nightfall to the Lamblin Coffee-house, where he hoped to meet friends and hear the news.

He had to go through the Valois Gallery, where swarmed the merry-makers, and his patriotic fury had overflowed. He stood by the entrance to pitch upon any one who gave him a pretext for a quarrel; but it never came. The foreigners had not taken possession of the famous pleasure-resort with pugnacious feelings. They were much more engrossed in the gastronomical rarities displayed in the windows and in dubious strollers in fine feathers, than in morose conquered warriors.

For an hour the colonel spent his ferocious glare and his provoking bearing for his pains, and began to despair that he should bring about a duel. Suddenly, he frowned more blackly than ever, as he believed he recognized somebody in the throng, and after a second's scrutiny, he uttered a growling exclamation and plunged into the thickest of the human current. By energetically plying his elbows, he soon reached a young man, clad in the latest fashion, who was walking before him.

"Albert!" he roughly called, as he seized his arm.

"The colonel!" was the promenader's reply as he turned around quickly.

Thinking the place ill-fitted for a conversation, Champoreau left the crowd again and led his prize out into the central garden. As soon as they were free of spectators, Boissier wanted to shake the cav-

alry officer's hand, but the other drew back and sternly said:

"Why are you masquerading here, *in mufti*, among all these execrable foreigners?"

"But, colonel," rejoined the cornet with some embarrassment, "I assure you that I am not here for pleasure-making, and that I suffer as much as you by this profanation; only I promised to be here."

"Promised whom?" demanded Champoreau, still sulkily.

"Prince Zodreff; why should I not tell you? Yesterday, on the Butte, he spared my life, and I wanted to live, because whatever happens to Napoleon, he has a son—"

"Right, boy! you may live to see the King of Rome Emperor of the civilized world. Good! But after all, I am indeed glad to see you again," and the veteran hugged the youth to his breast with vehement affection. "I am thankful to your prince, though he is a Russian."

"And so you, too, escaped this disaster?"

"Not through any fault of mine—a thousand thunders, no! But since I have found you again, I can almost console myself for seeing these brigands in Paris. Attention! heads up, eyes front—I believe here comes your Russian looking for you," so Champoreau interrupted himself.

Boissier turned around quickly, and perceived the Muscovite hastening toward him with open arms.

"Oh, my dear fellow, how charming you are to be so punctual," said the Russian with a soft tone, like the drawl of the dandies of the epoch.

"Prince," said Albert, shaking the hand cordially held out, "let me present to you my friend, Champoreau, Colonel commanding the Seventh Dragoons, my immediate captain."

The Russ offered his other hand, which threw the old dragoon into great perplexity, as he was very distrustful about foreigners. He colored up, but finally determined to accept the courtesy and almost crushed the proffered hand in his grip.

"Welcome, commandant," said the prince, without appearing to notice the hesitation; "I am a soldier like yourself, and we may be friends, now the war is finished."

Champoreau bowed, a trifle less stiffly.

"I discount the friendship beforehand," said Zodreff, "for I am going to ask a favor of you."

The colonel fairly stared with amaze, which Boissier could not help sharing.

"I have a duel to fight," continued the other in the calmest of tones, "and I should like you and Albert to stand by and see fair play."

"If it is against a Frenchman, you must not look to me," replied Champoreau brusquely.

"What do you take me for, colonel? I, fight with your fellow-countrymen, whom I adore, and I have been chafing these two years because I had to cross swords with them? No! a thousand noes! My adversary is a South German."

"That alters the case, and if Boissier calls for me any time to-morrow, I—"

"Pardon me, the engagement is for to night, I am given to understand," went on the prince, mysteriously.

"This evening," repeated the two dragoons in unison.

"Quite so. It is simple enough. This affair has been impending since some time past, as the adversary did wrong to a relative of mine; that might have been condoned, but the villain has been persecuting with his addresses a young lady to whom I have the honor to be engaged, and—need I say more? As I want to have some sport in Paris I have tried to settle this matter at once. Luckily a handy little fellow has come to my aid, and he has promised that my antagonist shall be brought face to face with me this night."

"Strange! At such an hour!"

"Tush! My intermediary is sharp and quick. Half an hour to go to the rendezvous and another to get through the affair and, you see, I shall not detain you long."

"Faith, the proposition suits me," said the colonel, "and if his seconds show fight I will take one of them."

"Well, no, I hardly think his companions will fight *for him*," remarked the prince, with a sarcastic smile. "I thank you for your adhesion, and he ought to thank you as well, for his being killed by a sword will save him from being hanged."

"I am ready to go with you," said Champoreau.

"And I, prince, thank you for having selected me," added Boissier, who had divined the antagonist.

"Very well, gentlemen, I am proud to have for my support two officers so brave; though I grant that it is showing too much honor to a scamp of the worst degree, and I am almost tempted to let him perish in the halter, as he merits—only my being his executioner may spare a fairer hand."

"Let me tell you, prince," interposed Albert quickly, "that if you have any repugnance to deal with this fellow, I undertake to expedite him to the nether world."

"Nay," said the Russ, after an instant's meditation and quite gaily, "the rogue wears an epaulet, all things remembered, and I can give him a sword-cut without degrading myself. It had better be me, taking all 'into consideration.'"

"Well, let us march upon the blackguard," said the commandant, swinging his formidable walking staff with a grand sweep.

"I beg five minutes to put a question to my assistant, whom I descry at the end of that walk, and we shall be off immediately," replied the boyar, directing his steps to the end of the gardens.

"What do you think of all this?" asked Champoreau, as soon as he was alone with his young companion.

"Merely that we are going to deal out justice to the scoundrel who stole away Therese Lecomte from her father's house at Eclaron," cried Boissier with heat.

"That Red Hussar!" exclaimed the dragoon commander. "Ha! A million thunders! What a pleasure it will be to see him run through; still, I should like to do it myself best."

"We might have a turn at him," muttered Albert between his clenched teeth. "The fox has as many turns and tricks as a fiend."

"Here I am, gentlemen," called out the prince, suddenly appearing among the trees. "All is ready for the chase, as I am told that the game will be decoyed out of his lair and led to where we want to hold him at bay. Only, as he must not be attacked in the thoroughfares, since he would but have to raise the cry in German that the French were upon him, to have us all overwhelmed by a host—I propose the following steps. Our man is up yonder in those gambling rooms, at No. 9, at the table. My envoy will induce him to come out, and as soon as he proceeds in the pursuit of a living bait we will follow him. I am aware that this looks a low act, but I beg to say that it is not of my contrivance. Only, learning what was afoot, and fearing that the woman and the boy who devised the affair were making an ambuscade and assassination of what ought to be a duel, I claimed the right as the kinsman of the murdered Hermann, of having the first blow. Is this still agreeable, gentlemen?"

"As much as ever," returned Champoreau, "on condition, indeed, that we have a fair fight," for he did not like so much mystery.

"I give you my word of honor," said the prince;

"against this villain, we are forced to adopt these indispensable precautions. I shall call you, Albert, presently, to follow me, as we will attract less attention going separately."

Champoreau and the younger dragoon exchanged glances and understood that their minds were alike made up.

"Come on," said the elder laconically, as he started to walk in the sandy path of the gardens, where it was as dark as the illuminated buildings all around the oblong space were bright.

This contrast was favorable for perceiving what occurred there without being noticed, and indeed nobody in the arcades paid them any heed. Their watch did not long endure, as, in some twenty minutes, they saw the prince come away from the gaming-house doorway, and presently appeared, coming down its stairs, two figures which presented each a more or less familiar aspect. In the first, slight, short and juvenile, was seen a street boy, beardless, sallow, with a grimy smudge on the upper lip which betokened a poor, scrubby moustache in the bud, who looked like any one of the thousands of his class; they infested the streets, offering to guide the strangers here, there and anywhere, for a few silver pieces, speaking a smattering of languages and making up for any deficiencies by a superabundance of gestures.

The gentleman whom he escorted—piloted, we had better say, was clad in the undress of a military officer, but from his tallness and thinness, the dra-

goons recognized the Red Hussar, much more quickly than they did the boy, who was the irrepressible Cocagne. The latter was disguised even for Minden's keen eyes and suspicious nature, which, however, the drafts of champagne, freely tendered on the gaming-house sideboard, had somewhat befogged.

On emerging from the doorway, with his eyes of the night-hawk, the little drummer had espied Prince Zodreff at a short distance and he sent him a glance of warning. But at the next instant, he made a gesture to another figure in the varied throng. And he directed Minden's eyes to the latter object alone.

It was remarkable, for it was a woman, and the fair sex were represented in the mob of military men by only a few, of no particular race, mongrels who flaunted bare shoulders in ball dresses and plumes, while this one, on the contrary, wore a black silk domino, or long, capacious cloak with a hood. Nevertheless, the grace and beauty of a faultless person is not to be entirely eclipsed by this masquerading mantle, and the eyes of the Austrian seemed to kindle at the sight of this somber blot on the bedizened multitude.

On seeing that the hussar had been conducted out of the saloon, this woman nodded, made a short beckoning sign to him, or the boy, and forthwith started to leave the press with a step so agile that it confirmed the impression of her youth. Although the hussar's long legs moved fleetly, the

woman kept her distance, and turning to the left, she came out of the gardens by the corner before the Old Louvre Palace.

Cocagne kept pace with the amorous Austrian, but found time, while the latter was enwrapt in the chase, to beckon to the prince. This one followed, and behind him came the two Frenchmen. Delayed by the crowd, they were behindhand when they saw the trio speeding on toward the river, but bearing to the left.

When they reached the waterside, they perceived that the woman had gone on up stream toward the small bridge which supplemented the main one at the Cathedral. Here, on either bank, were the old houses, mostly demolished in later years, where nefarious crafts were carried on while on the City Island itself, a cluster of similar structures harbored similarly dangerous tenants.

But little reassured by these dismal haunts of ungilded vice, Minden came to a halt, and those in the rear, able to approach through this delay, saw him evidently remonstrating with his guide.

At this moment, the woman, continuing her way as if sure of her magnetic attraction, came to a pause in the middle of the temporary bridge of wood, replaced in our days by an iron suspension viaduct.

Then little used, it was lonely, and at this hour the female figure stood isolated, in the wan moonbeams. But, with a weird coquettishness she let the river breeze disarrange the cowl, and a glimpse was

afforded of a beautiful dark face, while the wind pressed the light mantle around her figure and indicated a contour not to be rivaled by the sirens of the gambling-saloons which the Austrian had quitted for this lodestar.

Uttering an exclamation of admiration, he ceased his expostulations to the boy and bounded on so fast that the latter had some difficulty to keep up with him. Thus they ascended the bridge approach and stepped upon the structure.

The woman remained in the center, and, on the hussar coming nearer, she suddenly threw off the mantle and hood with so violent a gesture that they flew over the handrail and floated down upon the stream, shadowed at this spot.

In full career, Otto Minden checked himself—he turned pale, and was sobered in an instant.

“The peasant’s daughter!” he gasped, and felt for his sword.

“And the peasant’s nephew,” added a mocking voice as Cocagne sprang past him and ranged himself by his cousin’s side.

Though he believed they were both armed, that would not have daunted him, but a wild panic seized him—a cold shudder ran over him, as they say occurs to them who receive a warning that their last hour has come. He backed a few steps, turned in a panic to flee, and found himself barred by the Russian prince, who, sword in hand, tranquilly stood in the middle of the bridge. Behind him, the two dragoons loomed up, beyond the moonlight, the

elder grim, the other with glittering eyes—Boissier had also recognized Therese.

The Red Hussar drew his sword with a trembling hand, and tried to assume a calmness belied by his pallor and the convulsive twitches of his facial muscles.

The moon shook off the trailing clouds like tresses veiling a face, and the scene on the bridge was fully lighted up.

"An ambushade," said the Austrian. "I see," and his voice shook with rage and terror.

"Not the least in the world," retorted the Russian nonchalantly. "A month ago, you promised to measure blades with me when the war was over; and we entered Paris this morning, the armistice was signed yesterday, and I claim my right at present. These persons are simply lookers-on—you know them all, now."

Hemmed in, the wolf at bay preserved the most complete silence. All the sound, indeed, was the rushing and gurgling of the stream dashing not very roughly against the timbers of the trestlework pediments.

"Prince," said the Austrian, at length, recovering some self-command, "the honor which you confer upon me is great; but I must remind your highness that, though I promised at Troyes to fight in duello, it was not with you. I have never injured you."

"You are mistaken, sir," said the Russian gravely. "You have an offense to account to me for, which

all your blood cannot wash out—for you have insulted a lady whom I love!”

“This cannot be, my lord!”

“You pressed your suit upon Mdlle. de Saintclair, after you were informed by her that she was engaged to another, and, farther, you threatened her with persecution and with a menace that I should be punished for treason in sparing French prisoners, unless she bowed to your wishes. Enough, do you understand now what you have done when I say that Mdlle. de Saintclair will, in a month, be the Princess Zodreff?”

This declaration, spoken in accents of indescribable scorn, as unexpected as a lightning-stroke, threw the hussar into the deepest trepidation.

“It little matters,” said he, folding his arms, though he still held his sword in the hand now at his side, with the blade behind him, “I am not going to fight.”

“You will not fight?” exclaimed the prince, but with astonishing calm.

“Not thus, or here—now.”

At the same time Boissier, Cocagne, and Therese made a step toward the speaker, but the Russian waved them back with alarming quiet.

“Be it so,” said he. “Gentlemen,” he went on to the two officers, “will you be good enough to do me the service to guard this man, while I go and bring some soldiers to arrest him. Excuse me asking this of you, but the nearest station of soldiers is close by, and I shall soon return with a corporal’s

guard. Indeed, I am very wrong to rob the deathsmen of his lawful prey, for this officer ought to be hung."

"Hang me?" yelled the hussar, in a voice choking with rage and affright.

"As a murderer," said the prince scornfully; "I wonder I overlooked the crime before. But it did not become me, since we served under the same colors united, to deliver you to justice. Now that the war is finished, I wish you to cease to disgrace the Allied Armies, and as I am not to punish you with my own hand for murdering my kinsman Hermann von Finkinstein, I shall send you to the gallows to-morrow for the villainy."

"But it is false—there are no witnesses—no proofs!" shrieked the man, livid and tormented.

"The witness summoned—present!" said Cocagne, saluting in the soldier's manner. "I saw you shoot the militiaman in the Wood of Soulaines."

"And I produce proofs," said Albert, gravely, holding up the pocketbook perforated by the murderer's bullet on Hermann's breast.

On beholding this ensanguined relic, Otto recoiled to the bridge guard-rail, and thrust out his right hand to repel a ghastly vision. His eyes opened immeasurably, and his hair stood up on his head. The avowal which his lips refused to utter might be read on his discomposed features.

"Let us have done," said the prince, sternly. "If, in one minute you are not on guard, I, Boris Wasilvitz, of Zodreff, whose ancestors fought at the

siege of Kasan beside Ivan the Terrible, I give you my word as a nobleman, that I will drive you at the sword's point to the officers of justice."

He was pale now, and the white-hot wrath of the northerner shone in the clear glance of his steel-blue eyes. Otto, no doubt, saw that his case was hopeless, for he brought his weapon round in front.

"Engirt by enemies, I protest that this duel is murder," he said, raising his voice, in the hope perhaps to be heard by some passenger, but Cocagne knew Paris too well, and that here would be a spot without observers. "You force me to fight without my having seconds."

"Not so. Albert, oblige me by passing over to the gentleman's side," said the prince without emotion. "The colonel will have the kindness to assist you."

With military obedience, the two dragoons executed the maneuver, which placed them so that they cut off retreat in one direction, while in the other Therese and her cousin stood similarly on guard. The Austrian looked to the nearer bank, but it was lonely, all life being concentrated in the Palais Royal quarter, and both river-sides were hushed and deserted.

"I am waiting," said the Russian, as he fell upon guard.

Minden cast a last look around, like a wolf in a pitfall, but had to defend himself. The blades crossed and the fight began, to the high content of Champoreau, who had regarded the exchange of compli-

ments as so much time wasted. He regretted also that the combat was not begun with more solemnity, but it was too late, as the antagonists had rushed at each other with such fury that the encounter could not last long. Indeed, at the third pass, the prince was too slow in making a half-circle parade, and received a cut across the wrist which gave him such pain that he dropped his sword.

A direct thrust delivered with lightning rapidity would have transfixed the Russian had not the colonel's heavy cane beaten down the blade.

"Not the correct thing," said the old dragoon tranquilly; "no stabbing a disarmed adversary, mark that."

Calmly smiling, the prince let Albert bind up his wound in a handkerchief which Therese promptly held out. She had not said a word, and even in this humane act kept her burning eyes fastened on the victor in this first encounter. Happy to have come out so well, the latter was sheathing his saber when Albert exclaimed:

"Stay, I am expecting you to cross steel with me. We are all to have a turn, I think?"

"I have no quarrel with others," returned Minden, with reluctance at having to suppress his thoughts.

"But they have with you," returned the cornet fiercely, as he picked up the weapon the prince had let fall; "for instance I have an old account to settle with the kidnapper of young girls, whom I swore to brand as such with a slash across the face unless he stood to fight with me."

"I am not fresh; I have the right to refuse another fight at present."

"I allow you five minutes to breathe while the prince's wound is dressed."

But the Russian's hurt was already staunched.

"I advise you to accept this challenge," he coldly said to the hussar; "in the first place you may escape by getting wounded like me, and if on the other hand he kills you, you will spite the gallows."

"I agree," muttered the Austrian; "may I at least hope that with this man out of my way, it will be clear?"

"No, for you must kill me, too," said the colonel, while the mien of Cocagne and the woman was no more encouraging.

"Very handsome! This is French gallantry! a regular battue, only there is but one head of game and many hunters, I see. I suppose I am to cope with this young go-between of yours, too," he sneered, with a glance at Cocagne.

"With me?" said Cocagne; "I can handle a foil, at least."

And with me," spoke Therese for the first time; "you rode down upon the ambulances and you sabred the nurses—with pistol in hand I received you, then—with pistol I am ready for you, after these gentlemen have had their precedence."

"You will do the knave too much honor," said the prince; "never fear—he will be dead before it comes the lady's turn."

"We shall see about that," yelled the hussar, fly-

ing like a panther at the colonel, whom he chose from his having a cane, not a sword. He cleft this stick with a cut, and would have followed up with a blow on the defenseless head, but the old dragoon had no longer the agility of youth and his foot slipped. Light as a wild cat, the hussar leaped on the shoulder of the stumbling man, used it as a pedestal to reach the rail, a flat wooden bar, and with great fleetness ran on this height past Cocagne and the woman, whom the movement took by surprise. His course was toward the left bank, and he had all chances of attaining it.

He looked back with delight, and was about to leap down and continue the successful flight on the flooring, when this movement exposed his face to the group from which he had escaped. He saw the moonbeam glint on the brass barrel of a pistol in the girl's unfaltering hand—the flash was instantaneous, and, while he was involuntarily raising his arm to cover his eyes, the bullet struck between them. Reeling on the narrow footing, he uttered a howl of agony, and fell from the shock into the Seine. The muddy, yellow waters opened with a dull splash, and closed, frothing over the head of the assassin—Hermann was avenged.

"Only one man ever laid a rough hand on me," exclaimed Therese in a thrilling voice and with flashing eyes, her contained feeling finding vent, "and he is no more!"

"Well done!" roared the colonel. "You are born to be a soldier's wife—" and he darted a significant

look at Albert, who sprang to the girl's side, for she seemed to be swooning after this outburst and the fatigue of the recent days in the field.

EPILOGUE.

Two months subsequent to this tragic scene, on a lovely June morning, two weddings were celebrated at the same hour in the aristocratic church of St. Thomas d'Aquinas. Seldom had the fashionable parish gathered a more elegant congregation under its marble ceiling. On one side of the nave flocked the representatives of old families of France, who wished to hail with their presence the union of Mdle. de Saintclair, sole heiress of the Countess de Muire, with a man of her choice; he was there, supported by the dignitaries of the Czar, the Austrian Emperor and the King of Prussia—Boris Zodreff, typifying the East, victorious by its arms, but conquered by the gentle graces of the civilizing West. New France was pictured in Albert Boissier, in the dragoon's coat which had seen the fire of battle, amid these relics of the past, and the world of money had seized the occasion of a marriage in the banker's family to mingle among the nobles. He led to the altar the daughter of the Champagne peasant who had so well defended their home and his country.

With her calm and robust beauty, Therese was a personification of the race which might receive as meet homage the chorus of admiration for her heroism under the cannonade and the fusillade.

One of their missiles had struck down Father

Lecomte at the battle of Laon, into which he had valiantly led the last company of his home-raised legion, and he could not give away the bride: but the Parisian Democracy was to the front in the person of Auguste Cocagne. The affair was a little too solemn for one of his merry disposition, and he declined being best man. But he witnessed the ceremony by the side of Colonel Champoreau. The old dragoon, wishful like him to keep in the background, looked on tenderly from the rear, in company with the heroic boy, to whom he had taken a liking since he saved his life at Eclaron. The event in which they had been actors on the river bridge, had cemented true friendship between them, and the old commandant was vexed that the boy should renounce the military career, for which he had an aptitude, when he predicted to him a brilliant future. But the sharp drummer-boy comprehended that the era of warfare had closed, and it was not with much sorrow that he ratified an engagement with the Russian prince to go with him into the steppes.

Our brave Champoreau was forced, therefore, to concentrate all his affection upon Boissier, whose comrade and friend he remained after his marriage. He was the intended godfather for their first child, but the valorous soldier, who had braved death on all the battlefields of Europe, was slain at Waterloo, in the following year, while leading his dragoons upon a square of English infantry.

His faithful Ratibal, whom the peace of 1814 had restored to liberty, and who also took up the

sword again during the short campaign in Belgium, saw the old colonel fall by his side, and piously brought home his cross of the Legion of Honor.

Boissier, unable to join his regiment during the Hundred Days, sent in his resignation after the great defeat; and he welcomed the devoted orderly of his heroic commander. This humble survivor of those great wars, in which the Youngest Soldier had worthily wielded the sword of his father during its final battles, lived many years in the house of Boissier, who became one of the wealthiest bankers in Paris, and would lull his master's son to sleep with tales of the legendary era.

Cocagne followed the brilliant fortunes of Prince Zodreff in Russia, requiring nothing but to complete his education to succeed in that realm where French wit is cultivated as a choice exotic. After some years he became naturalized, and at the end of Alexander's reign, the Drummer of Montmirail was appointed captain in the Caucasus, where he charmed the Tiflis garrison with his jests, of a Parisian flavor. Prosperity nowise spoiled his excellent character, and he never forgot old friends, whom he was delighted to greet at least on one visit at St. Petersburg. Boissier kept the promise given to Boris, to pass a winter in his palace. He was received like a brother recovered after long parting.

The conversation of the two friends dispelled the only cloud which darkened sometimes the happiness of the ex-cornet of dragoons.

One evening, when Albert brought up the sub-

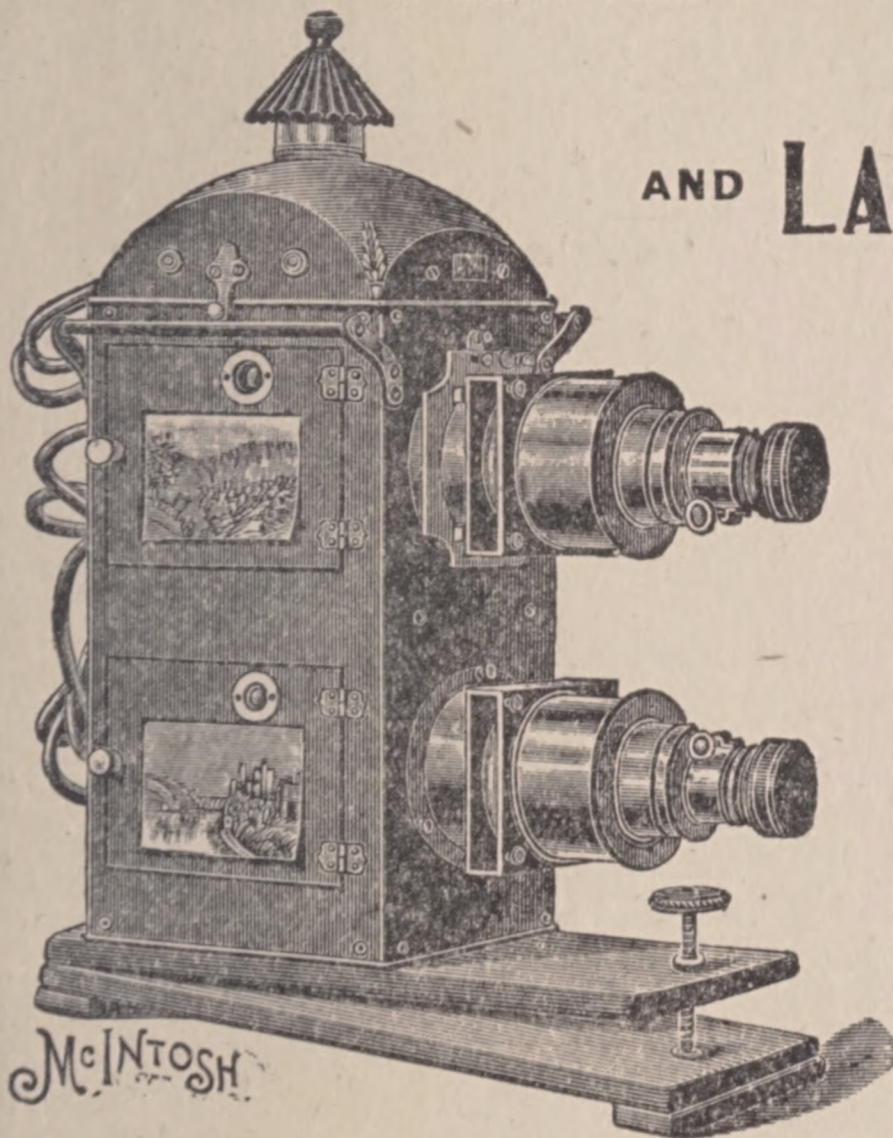
ject of the tragedy of the last day of March, 1814, the prince said in a grave tone:

“Never more mention that villain, Albert. Your wife was the executioner designated by heavenly justice, for the meanest of his crimes was aimed at lives of her sex. He was worse than a murderer; he betrayed those whose bread he had once broken. He sold the secret of the resting place where you and Colonel Champoreau bestowed the Countess de Muire and the charming girl who is my darling wife. I ought to have slain him, with my left hand, but I knew not that misdeed, then, though I had saved Cecile by a miracle, thanks to your Therese informing me in time of the treachery. But heaven knew, and heaven’s hand directed that pistol-shot. So ever fall the justice of heaven!”

THE END.

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